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# Revising the Iowa accreditation process for community colleges: a case study

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**Revising the Iowa accreditation process for community colleges: A case study**

by

Jan Erickson Snyder

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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2006

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**DEDICATION**

To  
my husband  
Tom,  
and our children  
Sara and Eric.

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**ABSTRACT**

Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that is required by law to have a formalized process that accredits its community colleges. In February of 2005, the Iowa Department of Education's (DE) Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation began a comprehensive review of the state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. This review was prompted by major changes in the criteria and processes of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools – Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC) which was effective in January of 2005.

The purpose of this case study was to collect, document, and analyze the data used to revise the state accreditation process so it would align more effectively with the revisions of the NCA-HLC to include their new criteria, core components, patterns of evidence and the accreditation processes—Program to Evaluate Academic Quality (PEAQ) and Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). In addition, the revision includes state standards that are mandated through state legislation.

The themes that were identified in the research were supported by multiple perspectives of the sample, documentation and the literature. Major themes identified through the study were: (a) Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education; (b) AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC Accreditation process among Iowa community colleges; (c) DE accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC processes and include both PEAQ and AQIP; and (d) state accreditation process adds value to Iowa's community colleges. Minor themes identified through the study were: (a) state standards referenced in

the Code of Iowa need to be included in the state accreditation process; (b) assessment of student learning is an integral part of the accreditation process; and (c) state accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practice and benchmarks with peer institutions.

The results of the study supported revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules that support *Iowa Code* sections 260C.47 – Accreditation of community college programs and 260C.48 – Standards for accrediting community college programs. In addition, research findings support revisions to the current *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When addressing the evolving topic of accreditation, Ewell (2004) recognized "...the fact that already accreditation *is* different. For better or worse, the majority of accrediting agencies – both institutional and specialized – are right in the middle of rethinking their approaches, and the degree to which this is happening is unprecedented" (p. 1).

Conversations on accountability in higher education are currently at the national forefront due to the current reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Eaton (2003) suggested the current reauthorization "...may mark a period of extraordinary divide between accreditation and the federal government" (p. 1). The Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the Commission on the Future of Higher Education continue to debate the appropriate measures that ensure the quality of our nation's distinctive colleges and universities.

On January 1, 2005, a regional member of CHEA, The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools – The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC), which accredits colleges and universities in 19 states, including Iowa, introduced major revisions to their "approach" toward accreditation. Crow and Kollenburg (2005) recognized, "Colleges and universities are currently changing more rapidly than they have in decades... accreditation must be responsive while maintaining its capacity to provide credible quality assurance" (p. v).

The major revisions to the NCA-HLC accreditation process consist of introducing five holistic and integrated new criteria that will support learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: (1) mission and integrity; (2) preparing for the future; (3) student learning and effective teaching; (4) acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge; and (5) engagement and service.

Each of the new criteria is accompanied by a set of core components which align with identifiable patterns of evidence.

Encompassing the new criteria are four overarching themes: (1) the future oriented organization, (2) the learning-focused organization, (3) the connected organization, (4) and the distinctive organization. Finally, to amplify the intent of policies established by the NCA-HLC, formal position statements have been created to address diversity, assessment of student learning, and general education.

In addition, the NCA-HLC identified two processes for accreditation; the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). The NCA-HLC will enable a college to utilize either process in their accreditation. Each of these processes is reflective of the new criteria, core components, patterns of evidence, overarching themes, and the new position statements.

The current attempts at reauthorization of the Higher Education Act prompted these significant changes in the NCA-HLC's approach to accreditation. These recent changes, predominantly in criteria and accreditation processes, prompted the need for Iowa to conduct a comprehensive review of the current state accreditation process. This study is reflective of several months in the field collecting data from various community college administrators and other stakeholders that support a comprehensive revision to the current state accreditation process.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The NCA-HLC's changes in approach toward accreditation prompted the Iowa Department of Education's Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation to

begin a comprehensive review of the current state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that is required by law to have a formalized process that accredits community colleges. The *Code of Iowa* (Vol. III, 2005) states:

...the state process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of the north central association of colleges and schools, including the evaluation cycle, the self study process, and the criteria for evaluation, which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260.C.48; and shall identify and make provisions for the needs of the state that are not met by the association's accrediting process. (p. 2,596)

The *Guide for State Accreditation of Community Colleges* (2003) provides a historical perspective of state accreditation. State legislation was enacted in 1990 to address the changing role of community colleges in higher education. At that time state accreditation standards were identified that addressed the following issues; quality, access, accountability, and institutional improvement.

In 1991, the Task Force on Accreditation and Program Review was established by the DE to provide broad community input in the development of the new accreditation process and standards for state accreditation. As a result, in 1992, 47 preliminary standards were identified and taken to 15 stakeholder groups for revision. In an effort to move toward a process that was less prescriptive and more evaluative, the Preliminary Accreditation Standards were renamed the State Criteria for Evaluating Iowa Community Colleges.

In 1994, the State Board of Education approved a pilot process addressing 36 State Criteria for Evaluating Community Colleges. As part of an on-going review of the process, in 1997, the 36 criteria were rewritten and the State Board of Education approved 18 criteria

which would become effective October 1, 1997. At that time, a crosswalk was developed to align the 18 criteria for state accreditation with the NCA-HLC criteria for accreditation.

Prompted by the most recent change in approach to accreditation by the NCA-HLC, in February of 2005, the DE, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, began a comprehensive review of the state accreditation process for the state's community colleges. In order to comply with the state code, the review process will specifically address the change in criteria and process.

In this context, the state is most interested in the NCA-HLC's five new criteria, core components, and examples of evidence and the two processes—PEAQ and AQIP that are outlined in *The Higher Learning Commission Handbook of Accreditation* (2003). In addition, the revisions will incorporate state standards for accreditation that are identified in Section 260C.48 of *Iowa Code* that include: (1) faculty minimum standards; (2) faculty load; (3) special needs; and (4) vocational program review and evaluation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to document and analyze the data used to revise the state accreditation process so it can be aligned more effectively with the 2005 revisions of the NCA-HLC to include their new criteria, core components, patterns of evidence, and the accreditation processes—PEAQ (Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality) and AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program). In addition, the revision will also include state standards that are mandated through state legislation. Specifically, the research findings will support appropriate revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules that support *Iowa Code* sections 260C.47 – Accreditation of community college programs and 260C.48 – Standards

for accrediting community college programs (Appendix A). In addition, research findings will support revisions to the current *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*.

The DE empowered the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force (Appendix B) with the primary responsibility of overseeing the revision of the state accreditation process. Membership of the Task Force included an administrator from each of Iowa's 15 community colleges, the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT) administrator, a representative from NCA-HLC, and administrators from the DE. An organizational meeting of the Task Force was held in February of 2005. At the same time, a DE administrative consultant was assigned to coordinate the process. In May of 2005 the researcher, as a participant observer for the project, was approved by the DE Chief Administrator and the Task Force.

### **Significance of the Study**

This case study is significant because the research will support recommendations for changes to the state accreditation process for the community colleges of Iowa through the Iowa Administrative Rules and the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*. The recommendations will come as a result of extensive research in the field with community college administration, faculty, and staff who support *Iowa Code* (2005): "The process shall be jointly developed and agreed upon by the department of education and the community colleges" (p. 2,596). The results of this study will respond to the national conversations presently underway regarding quality in higher education through accreditation, assessment, and accountability.



This case study will provide the DE with insights from the field to support the revision process. The DE will learn: (a) how the changes in the NCA-HLC criteria, core components, and patterns of evidence have and will impact the community colleges of Iowa; (b) about issues regarding the accreditation processes (PEAQ and AQIP) that are of concern to the community colleges; and (c) how to implement efficiencies between current state accreditation and reporting processes. The revised rules and guide that are an outcome of this research will assure the state's 15 community colleges are accountable to the citizenry by providing accessible learning opportunities that support each community college's distinctive vision, mission, and strategic initiatives.

### **Research Questions**

Patton (1980) stated: "...opinion/value questions try to find out what people think about the world or a specific program. They tell us people's goals intentions, desires, and values" (p. 207). Creswell (2005) suggested, "...researchers usually state multiple research questions so that they can fully explore a topic...the questions include the central concept, or central phenomenon, being explored" (p. 117). Stake (1995) suggested that the qualitative interviewer should arrive with a short list of issue-oriented questions, "...the purpose for the most part is not to get simple yes and no answers but description of an episode, a linkage, or an explanation" (p. 65).

The research questions in this qualitative study assessed the stakeholders view toward the state accreditation process and its relationship to the NCA-HLC accreditation process. The research questions guided the interview questions. The following questions were asked during each of the interviews, focus groups, and at a conference forum:

1. What current process is your college utilizing – PEAQ or AQIP?
2. Where is your college in the accreditation cycle?
3. How is your institution's choice between PEAQ and AQIP indicative of a particular concept of the purpose of accreditation?
4. What do you perceive to be the potential value added by the state accreditation process?

As the research progressed, additional questions were posed based on conversation with key stakeholders that addressed state standards, the state's position on assessment of student learning, and the importance of peer review in the accreditation process. The additional questions that were addressed in this study included the following:

1. How should the state standards be recognized in the state accreditation process?
2. How is assessment of student learning addressed as a component of the state accreditation process?
3. What impact does peer review have on the state accreditation process?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions clarify terminology that were used throughout this study and are specific to both the Iowa and the NCA-HLC accreditation processes. The terminology referenced can be found in the *Iowa Administrative Code, Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* and *The Higher Learning Commission Handbook on Accreditation*. In addition, terminology identified from research texts is identified by source.

*Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP):* Program for maintaining affiliation with the Higher Learning Commission based on the principles of continuous improvement (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Access:* The right of all individuals to educational opportunities, regardless of obstacles that may impede their success, including, but not limited to geographic financial, academic; physical, social, economic, and other institutional barriers. Access preserves and clarifies the concept of the “open door” upon which community colleges were founded, but places the responsibility to provide educational opportunities that enable students to succeed on the community college and on the State of Iowa (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Accreditation:* The approval process by which the Iowa State Board of Education confirms that criteria established has been met by a community college (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Achievement:* The measurable progress made by an individual in meeting his/her educational objective(s) and those established by the community college (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Administration:* Management and supervisory activities that support services necessary for the direction and control of an institution (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Approval:* A formal action by the State Board to grant a community college the authority to continue to carry out functions (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Articulation:* The process of mutually agreeing upon courses and programs earned at a sending institution, which are transferable between secondary or postsecondary institutions for credit or advanced placement at a receiving institution (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program):* See Academic Quality Improvement Program (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Assessment:* Any practice or procedure used in evaluating individuals, programs, or function (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Bounded system:* The “case” selected for study has boundaries, often bounded by time and place. It also has interrelated parts that form a whole. Hence, the proper case to be studied is both “bounded” and a “system” (Stake, 1995).

*Case study:* In qualitative research, this is the study of a “bounded system” with the focus being either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case (or cases) (Stake, 1995). A qualitative case study provides an in depth study of this system, based on a diverse array of data collection materials, and the researcher situates this system or case within its larger “context” or setting (Creswell, 1998).

*Community:* A group of individuals with common interests. Within the context of a community college, this refers to any “community,” from the classroom to the entire college service area (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Constituent:* An individual residing within a community college's service area. (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Core component:* Subcategories of the criteria for accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an organization meets the criteria (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Criteria for accreditation:* The requirements necessary for accreditation as established by the Iowa State Board of Education. The framework for determining an organization’s accreditation (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Developmental education:* A series of instructional and support services designed to provide opportunities for each student who requires assistance to successfully meet a career goal through postsecondary education. Developmental education assumes that each student has the ability to succeed in his or her program of choice, given the needed support and/or assistance (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Diversity:* The wide range of individual differences (such as race, ethnicity, beliefs, values, customs, social, economic background, skills, culture, ability, age, and gender) present in a community (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Emergent study:* The focus of the study emerges during the course of working on it instead of being known and targeted from the start (Krathwohl, 1998).

*Examples of evidence:* Illustrative examples of the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a core component of a criterion for accreditation (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation, 2005*).

*Focus group:* A panel, selected to be representative of a population, interviewed on a topic of interest. Probes determine the popularity of various comments and points of view and the depth of feeling toward them. There may also be trials of material to determine how the panel's reactions could be changed (Krathwohl, 1998).

*Focus visit:* A team visit that occurs between regularly scheduled accreditation site visits to examine specific operations of the college (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation, 2005*).

*Function:* Those programs, activities, and services that comprise all aspects of a college relevant to fulfilling its mission (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Gatekeepers:* Individuals who give approval to conduct a study, such as institution administrators, school boards, and department heads. In addition, persons who approve the

presentation of a study to an audience, such as editors and convention scheduling committee (Krathwohl, 1998).

*General education:* That portion of an instructional program designed to impart common knowledge, promote intellectual inquiry, and stimulate the examination of different perspectives (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Governance:* The management of a college's human, financial, and other resources (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Graduate:* A person who has fulfilled all the requirements of a program and has earned a certificate, diploma, or degree (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Higher Learning Commission (HLC):* The commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits degree-granting higher education organizations (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation, 2005*).

*Informants:* Persons selected for their sensitivity, knowledge, and insights into their situation, their willingness to talk about it, and their ability to provide access to new situations.

*Institutional effectiveness:* The level at which a community college meets the needs of its constituents (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Learning resources:* Library, media, and information services that include a range of information sources, associated equipment, and services accessible to students, staff, and the community (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines, 2006*).

*Maximal variation sampling:* A purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait (Creswell, 2005).

*Multiple perspectives:* In qualitative research refer to evidence for a theme that is based on several viewpoints from different individuals and sources of data (Creswell, 2005).

*Participant observer:* An observational role adopted by researchers in which they take part in activities in the setting they observe (Creswell, 2005).

*PEAQ (Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality):* See Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Program:* Instructional program; a grouping of courses leading to a degree, diploma or certificate (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ):* The traditional program for maintaining accreditation with The Higher Learning Commission (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Purposeful sampling:* A qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005).

*Qualitative research:* Research that describes phenomena in words instead of numbers or measures and usually uses induction to ascertain what is important in phenomena.

*Self-study process:* A formal, comprehensive, institution-wide process of self-examination in preparation for a scheduled comprehensive evaluation (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Self-study report:* A document prepared by an organization that describes the process used to conduct the self-study, evaluates what it learned, and proposes what it intends to do with the knowledge. The report functions as the formal argument that the organization satisfies the criteria for accreditation (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Site visit:* A team visit to a college campus (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Standards:* In the context of state accreditation, “standards” refers to aspects of college operations that are prescribed by *Iowa Code*. (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

*Team report:* Report that documents the findings and recommendation of an accreditation team (HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005).

*Under-prepared:* Lacking the background and experiences that would provide a student or potential student with the basic skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education (*State of Iowa Accreditation Guidelines*, 2006).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

At the onset of the study the researcher considered collecting data regarding state accreditation processes from all regional accrediting agencies. However, the response time from those agencies did not meet the established timeline. In addition, The NCA-HLC administrative staff articulated that Iowa was one of the few states in the region that employed a state accreditation process.

This case study initiated a purposeful sampling strategy that included input from the 15 community colleges’ chief academic officers, chief student service officers, career and technical education deans, associate of arts/associate of science deans, faculty, institutional research directors, and librarians. In addition, two college presidents and an Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT) administrator were included in the purposeful sample. The focus groups identified in the purposeful sample on account of size, time constraints, and knowledge of the research topic—accreditation—resulted in a limited dataset. Thus, the researcher chose to utilize the data from the purposeful sample as a secondary data source.



In order to include a variety of perspectives on accreditation, the researcher employed a maximal variation sample that would enhance the initial purposeful sample by including perspectives from personnel at individual colleges who had a direct relationship with the accreditation process on their campus. Creswell (2005) stated, “Maximal variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait” (p. 204). Therefore, five Iowa community colleges were selected for the maximal variation sample to represent a range of viewpoints on the topic of accreditation.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of an abstract, five chapters, appendices, references, and acknowledgements. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and identifies the purpose of the study as an opportunity to revise the current state accreditation process to align with the new criteria and processes introduced by the NCA-HLC in 2005, while remaining attentive to state standards mandated by *Iowa Code*. The chapter also contains the research questions, the definition of terms, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that supported the researcher in preparation and application of the case study. The literature review provides a solid foundation for the study by providing the political and historical perspectives of accreditation on national, regional and local levels.

Chapter 3 provides a summary of research methods employed in the study. Theoretical perspectives started with a broad orientation and were narrowed to the research process of the study. The researcher focused on theoretical perspectives which included

qualitative research through an interpretive approach utilizing case study. Data collection, analysis and validity support the findings that are identified in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 includes a comprehensive report on the findings of the case study based on the descriptive narrative that was a result of the interviews from the maximal variation sample, documentation pertinent to the subject matter, as well as the literature. The chapter also includes major and minor themes that were identified in the study.

Chapter 5 includes the researcher's overview of the study, theoretical perspectives, limitations, conclusions, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research on the topic of accreditation. The chapter also contains personal reflections from the researcher.

The final section includes appendices, references, and acknowledgements. Appendices include *Iowa Code* sections 260C.47 and 260C.48, Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force membership, consent to participate and interview protocol, research timeline, revised draft Guide for the State Accreditation of Iowa's Community Colleges, proposed rules sections 281 – 24.1(260C) and 281 – 24.2(260C), and responses from maximal variation sample and other key stakeholders.

## CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a case study, Merriam (1988) contended, “The literature review can help in the formulation of the problem, the selection of the methodology, and the interpretation of research results” (p. 63). She also stated, “non-data-based writings reflect the writer’s experiences or opinions and can range from the highly theoretical to popular testimonials” (p. 61). Krathwohl (1998) suggested that “filling your mind with the best relevant material from your area of interest is one of the most profitable ways of finding a good problem” (p. 87). Krathwohl also supported a rich historical context with regards to the literature.

Creswell (2005) suggested, “...reviewing the literature means locating summaries, books, journals, and indexed publications on a topic, selectively choosing which literature to include in your review, and then summarizing the literature in your report” (p. 9). In a qualitative study, review of the literature serves a dual purpose. Creswell (2005) indicated that the review of the literature can support the problem at the onset of the study and can also be a valuable source at the end of the study in support of the findings. The review of the literature will continue in Chapter 4. In this context, the literature will support the themes that have been identified as a result of the research.

### Overview

With the 2003 reauthorization of the Federal Higher Education Act of 1965, conversations on accountability and accreditation in higher education from multiple perspectives are ongoing. The underlying theme is that of quality in American higher education. Stakeholders include the United States Department of Education, The Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Council for Higher Education Accreditation

(CHEA) and its regional affiliates, state accrediting agencies, as well as colleges and universities across the country.

The literature review enhances the case study by providing a breadth of perspectives from national, regional, and local experts on accreditation. This chapter supports the case study regarding the review of the state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. The literature review provides a historical perspective on accreditation in American higher education.

With regards to community colleges, the search for substantive studies revealed limited results. The focus narrowed to literature that supports the following areas: (a) Higher Education Act of 1965; (b) Current Conversations on the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act; (c) Council for Higher Education (CHEA); (d) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools – The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC); and (e) State Accreditation for Iowa's Community Colleges.

### **Higher Education Act, 1965**

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was originally established to strengthen, in part, the community service programs of colleges and universities with the intent of finding solutions to community problems such as housing, poverty, government, recreation, employment, youth opportunities, transportation, health and land use (The Higher Education Act, 1965).

On behalf of the Congressional Research Service, Stedman (2002) stated that the federal presence in postsecondary education is shaped to a significant degree by the Higher Education Act. He cited that programs and activities of the Higher Education Act fall

primarily into four main categories: (1) student financial aid services; (2) help students complete high school and enter and succeed in postsecondary education; (3) aid to institutions; and (4) aid to improve K-12 teacher training at postsecondary institutions. The Higher Education Act allows federal appropriations to cover seven titles: Title I – General Provisions, Title II – Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, Title III – Institutional Aid, Title IV – Student Assistance, Title V – Developing Institutions, Title VI – International Education Programs, and Title VII – Graduate and Postsecondary Improvement Programs (p. 4).

The Higher Education Act has gone through several revisions since its inception, with the most recent funding authorizations expiring in 2003, the first session of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress. Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act occurs every five to six years. Eaton (2003) stated, “The most recent reauthorizations have framed the current conversations regarding the 2003 reauthorization with regards to accountability” (p. 1).

From a historical perspective, Eaton (2003) suggested that the 1992 reauthorization centered on the administrative and fiscal responsibilities in relation to student grant and loan programs contained in the Higher Education Act. Eaton explained, “...accreditation found itself encumbered with a host of new obligations focused on institution and program compliance with student-aid requirements – in addition to its obligation to assure academic quality” (p. 5). [Wergin \(2005\)](#) referenced the following of the 1992 extension “...contained a checklist of items that must be included in any evaluation, such as mission, curriculum, resources, and so forth” (p. 35).

The 1998 reauthorization focused on distance learning. Eaton (2003) cited, “In this context, the accountability conversation centered on how accreditation could sustain quality

while at the same time precludes the likelihood of fraud and abuse” (p. 5). With regards to distance learning, Ewell (2003) recognized, “...increasing pressure on accreditors to develop review approaches that are capable of looking at instructional programs that are not anchored in ‘seat time’... involve resource levels and configurations quite different from those which their established standards were designed to address” (p. 4).

Student learning outcomes were a significant part of the 1998 conversation with regards to accountability. These discussions culminated in a reordering of the federal standards for recognition of accrediting organizations with the first standard calling on accrediting organizations to assess “...success with respect to student achievement in relation to its mission” (Eaton, 2003, p. 5).

The major expenditure that came as a result of the Higher Education Act was student aid programs. This came as a result of the increased number of students in higher education following the Korean War. Eaton (2003) summarized:

The accreditation process became increasingly involved with the federal government in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As demand for higher education expanded especially after the Second World War, the federal government also expanded its federal grant and loan programs to accommodate the growing number of students attending colleges and universities. In the course of this expansion, the federal government needed reliable information about the academic quality of institutions and programs and turned to accreditation for this purpose. A valuable public-private partnership emerged. (p. 3)

Thus, the United States Department of Education’s primary purpose of accreditation was to assure that federal student aid funds are purchasing quality courses and programs (CHEA, 2002, p. 3). The USDE (2006) stated:

Only institutions that are accredited by a United States Department of Education (USDE) recognized accrediting organization is eligible to receive federal financial assistance for their students. Most institutions attain

eligibility for federal funds by holding accredited or preaccredited status with one of the accrediting agencies recognized by the Secretary, in addition to fulfilling other eligibility requirements.

Stedman (2002) cited critical topics that were debated in the current review of the reauthorization process as: access to postsecondary education; college costs and prices; federal tax benefits; standards and accountability; needs analysis; distance education; teacher quality and quantity; student loans; and Pell Grants. Field (2006) stated, “In a discussion of whether the panel should take a position on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which governs most federal student aid – programs, Mr. Miller... ‘We think getting into the political realm wouldn’t be beneficial’ ” (p. 3).

### **Recent conversations on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act**

The current reauthorization of the Higher Education Act has set the stage for conversation between the government and private accrediting agencies regarding the value of accreditation. Wergin (2005) stated, “...accreditation, largely an American invention, is the only organized means by which the academy provides quality assurance to the general public” (p. 35). Ewell (1998) recognized “...we need to squarely recognize the fact that we have evolved a pretty standard set of practices that don’t vary much from agency to agency, while the rest of the world employs approaches that are quite diverse in character” (p. 2).

Eaton (2003) suggested, “the current reauthorization, underway in 2003 and extending into 2004, may mark a period of extraordinary divide between accreditation and the federal government on the issue of accountability” (p. 1). In this context, accountability and evidence of institution and program performance and student learning outcomes is at the forefront. In reference to current practice of colleges and universities, Ewell (2001)

contended, “Virtually all now include explicit references to student learning in their standards for accreditation” (p. 1).

Ewell (1998) stated reasons for the current conversations on quality in higher education:

The first and most fundamental is a decisive change in the nature of teaching and learning itself which is effecting both individual college classrooms and how institutions “organize themselves” for learning. A second somewhat associated trend is the manner in which postsecondary teaching and learning is becoming “de-institutionalized” – becoming both the product of multiple institutions in the case of a given student and increasingly the province of providers beyond the academy. The third and final force is the pressure for public and “customer” engagement in the process of quality assurance, both to ensure that relevant information about institutional performance is collected and to address wider concerns about the lack of accountability in higher education. (p. 3)

Eaton (2003) recognized, “...federal officials have moved from “Accrediting organizations are accountable if they do a responsible job of carrying our reviews” to “Accrediting organizations are accountable if they do a responsible job of carrying out reviews *and there is evidence that institutions and programs perform well and that students learn*” (p. 6).

Spellings (2005) created a 19 member Commission to develop a comprehensive national strategy on higher education. Field (2005) reported, “...the secretary has defined the commission’s task in the broadest of terms, saying that it will tackle such global issues as access, affordability, accountability, and productivity (p. 3). Field (2006) stated, “...books, combined with testimony given at commission meetings, have convinced Mr. Miller that American higher education needs to undergo radical changes” (p. A-17).

The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education and CHEA share divergent views on the topic of accreditation and its relation to accountability at



the federal level. In regard to the federal Commission's view, Bollag (2006) stated, "...the accreditation proposal has drawn fierce criticism from regional accreditors and from leaders of the American Council on Education and the Council of Independent Colleges" (p. 1).

Dickeson (2006) interpreted the purpose of accreditation as serving both the institution and the public. From the perspective of the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Dickeson outlined the institutional purposes of accreditation as: (a) colleges and universities are accredited for self-improvement; (b) institutions assert that accreditation helps advance academic quality; (c) accreditation is linked to planning; and (d) institutions use accreditation as a medium of inter-institutional exchange.

Dickeson (2006, pp. 2-3) identified the public purposes of accreditation as: (1)...consumer protection; (2) accreditation should assure that the public interest is honored, particularly with the respect to public investment; (3) the public has a right to know about quality; and (4) there are numerous stakeholders in higher education that must rely on solid accreditation: students and prospective students; families that provide support to students; donors and grantors; employers who hire graduates; and the general public. Bollag (2006) stated that the Commission, "...appears to want an accreditation system "that doesn't require lots of judgment, a system with cut and dried measurements" (p. 23).

From Eaton's (2003) perspective, the federal government and CHEA see similarities and differences as to what constitutes appropriate accreditation. Eaton concluded both accreditors and the federal government tend to agree on three issues: (1) it is essential that accreditation be accountable to higher education, students, and the society; (2) this accountability is achieved by developing and using evidence of the effectiveness of institutions and programs; and (3) this evidence of effectiveness is a mix about information

about resources, processes, institution and program performance, and student learning outcomes.

Eaton (2006) stated, “On the other hand, a number of accreditors and some officials in the federal government tend to disagree on two issues: the relative importance of various types of evidence and locating fundamental responsibility for evidence of performance and outcomes with institutions and programs (p. 12).

Eaton (2003) suggested that there are four options for response to calls for additional accountability: (1) do nothing – “this too shall pass”; (2) reaffirm the effectiveness and value of accreditation; (3) end the accreditation-federal government partnership; or (4) bridge the divide between accreditation and government.

The current conversations culminate with a report from the Federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education in its final report to Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, in September of 2006. Field (2006c) quoted one Commission member’s opinion of the final report, “The tone should be that while higher education in the United States is the best in the world, the imperatives of our time require that we raise the bar and become even better to serve the nation” (p. 18). In regard to the Commission’s chairman, Charles Miller’s opinion of the final report, Field stated, “...he promises to spare no one, not even the Department of Education, which commissioned it” (p.18). Eaton (2003) posed, “Is accreditation accountable?’ Yes, it is. However, what it means to be accountable is often in the eye of the beholder – in this case either the eye of the federal government or the eye of the accreditor” (p. 19).

### Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is the private entity that recognizes accrediting organizations. Eaton (2006) explained that CHEA is funded through its member institutions in higher education, while the United States Department of Education (USDE) is funded through the United States (U.S.) Congress. The regional accrediting organizations serve as a conduit between CHEA and the USDE. In addition, the accrediting organizations serve as a conduit between the states, higher education institutions and higher education programs (Figure 1).

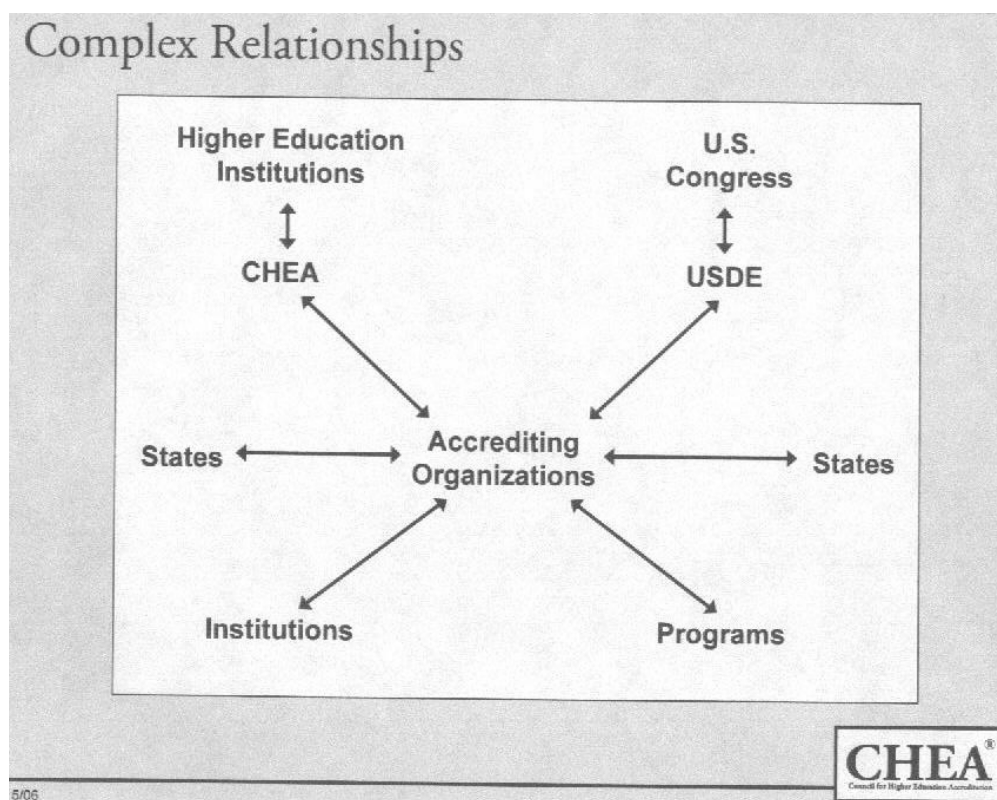


Figure 1. Complex relationships in accreditation<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eaton (2006) outlined the complex relationships in accreditation. The stakeholders include higher education institutions, CHEA, U.S. Congress, USDE, accrediting organizations, states, higher education institutions, higher education programs, students, families, and the public.

Eaton (2003) described CHEA as “...an institutional membership of some 3,000 degree granting colleges and universities, [that] plays a vital role as a national institutional voice for accreditation” (p. 2). Wergin (2005) stated, “The Council for Higher Education (CHEA) has become both a political mouthpiece for accreditation in Washington and the source of key policy documents” (p. 37). Wergin also stated that CHEA is the primary national voice for voluntary accreditation and quality assurance to U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Education, “serving as an advocate for voluntary accreditation, a source of data and information about regional, national and specialized accrediting organizations” (p. 38).

CHEA is a private, non-profit organization whose primary purpose is to assure and strengthen academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in courses, programs and degrees in higher education. Eaton (2006) remarked, “Accreditation in the United States is unique in the world as an approach to institutional development and quality assurance because it remains essentially institutionally owned and governed” (p. 1). The 2004-2005 CHEA Annual Report stated, “CHEA recognition confers an academic legitimacy on accrediting organizations, helping to solidify the place and of these organizations and their institutions and programs in the national higher education community” (p. 3). Current CHEA Board Chair, Richard P. Traina, stated, “CHEA was created as the country’s primary institutional voice for accreditation” (p. 1).

Eaton (2003) defined accreditation as “a private form of self regulation that serves not only higher education itself, but also students, government, and the public ... accreditation has been central to an ongoing commitment to excellence that characterizes the U.S. higher education enterprise” (p. 1). Accreditation plays four pivotal roles in the U.S. society and

differs from other countries. Eaton suggested that accreditation: (a) sustains and enhances the quality of higher education; (b) maintains the value of higher education; (c) is a buffer against the politicizing of higher education; and (d) serves public interest and need.

In a recent study conducted among college presidents, CHEA (2006) reported, “When asked about accreditations basic performance from the point of view of institutions, a number of interviewees ranged from solid to enthusiastic support for the process overall” (p. 3). The most prominent positive responses were:

1. The opportunity provided for self-study and reflection which the institution might not do on its own.
2. Recent changes in regional accreditation to make it more flexible and linked to local planning and evaluation mechanisms.
3. Self regulation is preferable to government regulation.
4. An “external clock” on internal quality processes.
5. Outcomes orientation.
6. The opportunity for the campus to take action on an issue of importance.
7. The fact that the “peer review” process allows “cross fertilization” of ideas as people get beyond their own campuses to serve on teams.

**North Central Association of Colleges and Schools –  
The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC)**

CHEA recognizes accrediting organizations on both a national and regional level. The national accrediting organizations operate throughout the country and review entire institutions. Bollag (2006) stated, “Most higher-education institutions in the United States are

accredited by one of six regional accrediting associations...private bodies, answerable to the institutions they accredit” (p. 2). Eaton (2005) identified the six regional accrediting organizations as:

1. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA)  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
2. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC-CIHE)  
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC-CTCI)  
Commission on Technical and Career Institutions
3. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA-HLC)  
The Higher Learning Commission
4. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)
5. Southern Associations of Colleges and Schools (SACS)  
Commission on Colleges
6. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC-ACCJC)  
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC-ACSCU)  
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (p.22).

The NCA-HLC (2005) recorded:

On March 29 and 30, 1895, thirty-six school, college, and university administrators from seven Midwestern states met at Northwestern University. They had been called to “organize, if deemed expedient, an association of schools of the North – Central States.” The constitution of the association formed by these educators stated that the North Central Association’s object would be “the establishment of close relations between the colleges and secondary schools” of the region. (p. 1.1-2)

In 1999-2000, the NCA-HLC engaged in a major review of its mission, leading to the adoption of new strategic goals, including goals for “increasing the focus of accreditation on the quality of higher learning” and providing “multiple Commission accreditation processes

that place emphasis on the institutions own processes of quality assurance and quality improvement” (*Handbook of Accreditation*, 2003, p.1.1-4).

This review was marked by extensive participation from affiliated organizations and other stakeholders. Crow and Van Kollenburg (2003) stated that colleges and universities are changing more rapidly than they have in decades. “To be effective, in this changing environment, accreditation must be responsive while maintaining its capacity to provide credible quality assurance” (p. v).

The NCA-HLC (2003) highlights five new criteria, four cross cutting themes and three Commission statements that were effective January 1, 2005. The new criteria support the mission of the NCA-HLC: “Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher education” (p.1.1-2). In addition, two distinct processes for accreditation are defined as the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).

### **NCA-HLC five new criteria**

In the late 1920s, “standards had become roadblocks to legitimate experimentation and constructive change” (p. 1.1-3). As a result “standards” were replaced by “criteria”. Currently, the NCA-HLC defines criteria as necessary attributes of an organization accredited by the Commission. Taylor, Spangehl, and Branham (2006) supported, “...live the criteria so they become organic or natural to the organization.” Five new criteria were formulated as a result of the 1999-2000 major review that was undertaken by the Commission.

NCA-HLC (2003) identified criterion one: “*Mission and Integrity*: the organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff and students” (p. 3.2-1). Ewell (1992) recognized, “the heart of any definition of institutional effectiveness remains the ability of an institution to match its performance to its established purposes as stated in its mission.” Alfred, Ewell, Hudgins, and McClenney (1999) suggested, “The wise use and responsible stewardship of available resources in the pursuit of mission related goals must become an integral part of today’s definition of effectiveness” (p. 7).

NCA-HLC (2003) identified criterion two: “*Preparing for the Future*: the organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities” (p. 3.2-5). Crow (2006) suggested, “...become very adept at strategic planning processes that allow them to position themselves in a highly competitive global marketplace and to be nimble enough to implement shifts even as they keep their eyes on the basic goals” (p. v). Lerner (1999) recognized, “...provides a framework for achieving competitive advantage, allows all university constituencies work together towards accomplishing goals...” (p. 4). Taylor et al. (2006) encouraged, “...envision what the future looks like from trends in politics, society, economics and technology.”

NCA-HLC (2003) identified criterion three: “*Criterion Three – Student Learning and Effective Teaching*: the organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates its fulfilling its educational mission” (p. 3.2-8). In the current debate between the federal government and accreditors, the topic in criterion three has gained the most attention as it relates to assessment of student learning. Neill and Williams (2003)



recognized, “Moving from plans for assessing student achievement to action and results presents many challenges for colleges committed to a process improvement philosophy” (p. 95).

According to Field (2006a), Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, suggested, “...while colleges have historically been ‘allergic’ to the idea of assessment, they are reaching a tipping point where the institutional leadership is stepping up” (p. 2). Crow (2006) stated, “Although assessment has often been shaped either by demands for accountability or by scholars of the science of learning, perhaps one of the most profound impacts on the academy will be helping faculty develop a collective responsibility for the learning achieved by students” (p. v).

NCA-HLC (2003) identified criterion four: “*Criterion Four – Acquisition, Discovery and Application of Knowledge*: the organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission” (p. 3.2-12). Crow (2006) recognized, “...colleges and universities are open to studying and implementing management techniques that hold the promise of helping the institution fulfill its mission most effectively” (p. v). Taylor et al. (2006) offered, “There appears to be a level of anxiety among colleges regarding accreditation. They wonder, ‘what will the team think of us?’ The real question should be, ‘What do we think of ourselves?’ ”

NCA-HLC (2003) identified criterion five: “*Criterion Five: Engagement and Service*: as called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituents and serves them in ways both value” (p. 3.2-16). Taylor et al. (2006) supported, “...engagement of the institution with constituencies while both groups learn from one another. Real learning

happens as a result of this synergy.” Crow (2006) suggested, “...aligning curriculum with shifting workforce and national needs while several address it through programs to enhance civic engagement” (p. v).

Each of the new criteria is accompanied by a series of core components. The NCA-HLC (2003) suggested, “An organization addresses each Core Component as it presents reasonable and representative evidence of meeting a Criterion” (p. 3.1-1). Examples of Evidence support the Core Components. These examples are suggested and not mandated. Organizations have an opportunity to provide other examples that are not identified. The NCA-HLC stated, “...the absence of a specific type of evidence does not in and of itself mean that the organization fails to meet a Core Component” (p. 3.1-1).

To support the new criteria, four themes have been identified: (1) the future-oriented organization; (2) the learning-focused organization; (3) the connected organization; and (4) the distinctive organization. NCA-HLC (2003) suggested:

The purpose of the Commission in crafting these overarching themes was to: highlight primary attributes of effective and high-performing organizations valued by the Commission; establish broad benchmarks for evaluating the interpretation and application of the new Criteria; indicate the interrelatedness of the Criteria; and suggest an organizational schema that could inform self-study processes and give structure to self-study reports. (p. 3.3-5)

In 2003, the Board of Trustees of the NCA-HLC identified three position statements addressing diversity, assessment of student learning, and general education. Crow (2003) suggested that, by adopting a formal position statement for the Commission, “...the Board of Trustees explains the premises which it creates certain policies. The position statements, therefore, amplify the intent of policies and are not policies in and of themselves” (p. 3.4-3).

Hamilton and Black (2001) stated, “Accrediting organizations across the country are exploring a range of new approaches to assuring quality through the accreditation process” (p. 8). The NCA-HLC (2003) recognized, “...understands that no single accreditation process represents the only – or – best way to assure and advance quality ... Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ), therefore on the surface may appear simply to be traditional accreditation renamed. But the name itself, like AQIP, sets goals and objectives for the program” (p. 5.1-1).

### **Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ)**

In 1999-2000, the more traditional accreditation process, PEAQ, was reviewed with the intent of raising important questions about the fit of process by broader goals and establishing a new identity. The HLC-NCA (2003) stated, “The processes that mark the traditional pathway – PEAQ – include: institutional self study, evaluation of a team of trained peer reviewers, and final decision making by the Commission” (p. 5.1-1).

CHEA (2002) supported, “Self studies require extensive documentation and evidence of quality of an institution or program” (p. 4). Pemberton and Linne (2003) recognized the self study process should demonstrate that a continuous assessment and improvement model is incorporated in all operations” (p. 89). Noonan and Swanson (2003) suggested, “The self study should include all important new developments, whether positive or negative...must also demonstrate progress in areas that were noted in the prior visit as needing improvement” (p. 79). Van Wagoner and Hoffman (2003) suggested, “One of the many challenges in the self-study process is to engage all employees in the process” (p. 52). In addition, Foster

(2003) remarked, "...the hardest part of the self-study process is getting whole hearted faculty cooperation" (p. 47).

The peer review in the PEAQ process aligns with the work of the accreditation visiting team. Ewell (1998) suggested, "Calls to 'open up' the process of peer review have been heard frequently since the mid 1980's when public accountability for higher education first became a major national preoccupation" (p. 7). Dickeson (2006) stated, "...currently colleges and universities are accredited for self improvement ... conducting a self-study and having it validated by an external group of peers, institutions can take a look at it and determine institutional progress over time" (p. 2).

CHEA recognized, "Peers have a responsibility to the entire higher education community and closer to home; they do not seek to undermine the perceived quality of their own institutions or programs by recommending accreditation for anyone who wants to get accredited" (p. 5). Ewell (1998) stated, "Despite many changes in the content of accreditation this mode of operating has been relatively unaltered over the past half century" (p. 9).

### **Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)**

A grant from the Pew Charitable Trust launched AQIP in 1999. The NCA-HLC (2003) identified, "AQIP's goal is to infuse the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education" (p. 6.1-1).

Ammentorp and Trites (2002) recognized, "Learning is the center of all quality initiatives from the earliest conception by Shewart through refinement by Deming and Juran to present day emphasis on standards...the focus is on student learning and on the

organizational arrangements that guarantee and improve it” (p. 55). Ballinger, Donley, and Wright (2003) suggested, “Preparing the campus for a long-term commitment to quality tied to accreditation is a challenging but rewarding journey” (p. 39).

AQIP has identified nine criteria that align with the five new criteria of the NCA-HLC. Although the AQIP criteria examine an organization from a perspective different from the lens used in the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation, they ultimately permit an institution to create a body of evidence that will allow easy proof that it fulfills the Commission’s Criteria (p. 6.2-3).

The NCA-HLC stated, “AQIP consists of several core processes that engage the organization; the Strategy Forum, Action Projects, Systems Portfolio and the Systems Appraisal. The Strategy Forum is a supportive, facilitated peer review process to help an organization select, critically examine and commit to a set of Action Projects that will drive quality improvement” (p. 6.3-1). “Each Action Project must identify: a serious and visible difference to institutional performance; embody challenging but attainable goals; stretch the organization to learn and excel in new ways; and focus on both efficiency and benefits to students and other stakeholders” (p. 6.3-2).

A System’s Portfolio is assembled by each institution in the first three years of the process. This component requires committed involvement from faculty and staff. “Crafting the Systems Portfolio is an opportunity to look at systems and processes in new and revealing ways” (p. 6.3-2).

### Accreditation Process for the State of Iowa

State legislation passed in 1965 created Iowa's system of comprehensive community colleges. The system is comprised of 15 independent community colleges. Fall 2005 credit enrollments range from 1,081 to 15,480. Total enrollment during that time for the state system was 82,499 (Iowa Department of Education, 2005). The 15 colleges serve constituents in both rural and urban areas. Silag and Snyder (2006) recognized, "Although each of the colleges subscribes to the 12 points referenced in the *Iowa Code*, they each take pride in retaining their distinctiveness within the communities they serve" (p. 4:10).

The *Code of Iowa* (Vol. III, 2005) defines the mission of the colleges within the state system as follows:

- ...to meet, to the greatest extent possible, educational opportunities and services, when applicable, but not be limited to:
1. The first two years of college work including pre-professional education;
  2. Vocational and technical training;
  3. Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers;
  4. Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age;
  5. Programs for all students of high school age, who may best serve themselves by enrolling for vocational and technical training, while also enrolled in a local high school, public or private;
  6. Programs for students of high school age to provide advanced college placement courses not taught at a student's high school while the student is also enrolled in the high school;
  7. Student personnel services;
  8. Community services;
  9. Vocational education for persons who have academic, socioeconomic, or other disabilities which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs;
  10. Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens;
  11. Vocational and technical training for persons who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school;
  12. Developmental education for persons who are academically or personally under prepared to succeed in their program of study. (p. 2,580)

Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that conducts its own accreditation process for community colleges. The *Code of Iowa* (Vol. III, 2005) cited:

The state board of education shall establish an accreditation process for community college programs by July 1, 1997. The process shall be jointly developed by the department of education and the community colleges. The state accreditation process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of the north central association of colleges and schools, including the evaluation cycle, the self study process, and the criteria for evaluation, which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260C.48; and shall identify and make provision for the needs of the state that are not met by the association's accreditation process. (p. 2,596)

Laanan (2001) stated, "Although accountability requirements may differ from state to state, they share the same goal—improving educational and institutional effectiveness" (p. 70). Silag and Snyder (2006) explained, "...accountability has been one of the fundamental purposes of community college accreditation in Iowa ... in addition to accountability, the designers of Iowa's community college accreditation process intended that implementation of the process would encourage the colleges to increase their effectiveness"(p. 4:10). Silag and Snyder (1991) cited that the Iowa Department of Education recognized, "Effectiveness in this context means that each of the colleges would continue developing the characteristics that make it unique and able to meet the needs of its constituents, yet meet reasonable standards set for all colleges" (p. 4.10).

Silag and Snyder (2006) stated, "The Iowa Department of Education's Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation is now revising Iowa's community college accreditation process ... new criteria are accompanied by extensive discussions about the potential applications of continuous quality improvement principles in postsecondary educational institutions" (p. 4.10).

## Summary

This review of the literature is significant because it comes at a time when accountability and accreditation continue to be major conversation topics in higher education in both the private and the public sectors. Crow (2006) suggested, "... accreditors are all grappling with the challenge of raising the quality of higher education" (p. 3). The current debate between the private accrediting agencies and the federal government on accreditation has quality in higher education at the forefront. Eaton (2003) recognized, "...accreditation has been central to an on-going commitment to excellence that characterizes the U.S. higher education enterprise" (p. 1).

The NCA-HLC recently reviewed their criteria for accreditation through a process that began in 1999-2000 and culminated on January 1, 2005, with five new criteria identified: (1) mission and integrity; (2) preparing for the future; (3) student learning and effective teaching; (4) acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge; and (5) engagement and service (NCA-HLC, 2005). The five new criteria are addressed through two NCA-HLC accreditation processes, the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) and the Academic Quality Improvement program (AQIP).

For the purposes of accountability and institutional effectiveness, the state of Iowa has been engaged in an accreditation process of its community colleges since 1990. Silag and Snyder suggested, "...review of the current process has the potential to advance the quality movement of Iowa's community colleges" (p. 4.13). Laanan (2001) posited, "Accountability is here to stay and will need to be a major policy initiative" (p. 73).



## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed to document and analyze the data used to evaluate the existing state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that accredits community colleges based on mandates identified in a state code (see Appendix A, *Code of Iowa*). In addition, significant changes in the NCA-HLC criteria and processes prompted the need for this study.

Krathwohl stated that research is a creative act and encourages researchers:

...not to confine your thinking about it to specific approaches. Researchers creatively combine the elements of methods in any way that makes the best sense for the study they want to do. Their only limits are their imagination and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly. (p. 27)

This qualitative research employed a theoretical orientation utilizing an interpretive qualitative approach through a case study. The methods that underpin the research design are focused in this chapter.

### Theoretical Perspectives

#### Qualitative research

Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (1998), "...is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Bogdan and Biklin (1992) defined five features of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive.

3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.
4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively.
5. “Meaning” is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. (pp. 29-32)

Krathwohl (1998) contended:

Qualitative research describes phenomena in words instead of numbers or measures and usually uses induction to ascertain what is important in phenomena. An inductive approach begins without structure but structuring the study as it proceeds, by exploring to find what is significant in the situation, by trying to understand and explain it, by working in a natural situation, and by describing in words. (p. 27)

Merriam (2002) suggested, “...there are constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. As compared to a quantitative approach that assumes that reality is fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon” (pp. 3-4).

### **Interpretive qualitative approach**

Qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2002), encompasses several philosophical and or theoretical orientations, the most important being interpretive, critical and postmodern. Lather (1992) outlined his theoretical perspectives in terms of understanding (interpretive), emancipation (critical and feminist) and deconstruction (postmodern). Gaul, Borg, and Gaul (1996) defined interpretive research as the study of the immediate and local meanings of social actions for the actors involved in them.

Merriam (2002) identified the key characteristics of various interpretive qualitative research designs as:

1. Researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about the world and their experiences.

2. Researchers are the primary instruments for data collection and data analysis.
3. Process is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypothesis to be tested (as in positivist research).
4. Product of qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive.

An interpretive theoretical perspective can support several research designs, the most common being grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, or case study. Merriam (2002) stated, “Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an *interpretive* qualitative approach” (p. 4). The research takes on an interpretive qualitative approach through a case study as the researcher focuses on how the community colleges of Iowa understand the state accreditation process.

### **Case study**

Scholars have defined case study research in terms of process, end product, and unit of analysis. Stake (2000) suggested that case study “...is a choice of what to be studied” (p. 435). Merriam (2002) ascertained, “...qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 178). A case study is a research strategy. Yin (1994) poised case study research as “...a way of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of prespecified procedures” (p. 15).

Creswell (1998) stated, “A case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). The “case” selected for study has boundaries, often bounded by time and place. It also has interrelated parts that form a whole. Hence, the proper case to be studied is both “bounded” and a “system” (Stake, 1995).

The bounded system in this case study is the state accreditation process. It is bound by time in the sense that the accreditation process has a rich history with Iowa’s community colleges. This case study was bound by place as it might solely impact the accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges. A qualitative case study provides an in depth study of this system, based on a diverse array of data collection materials, and the researcher situates this system or case within its larger “context” or setting (Creswell, 1998).

The process of conducting a case study begins with the selection of the “case.” The selection is done purposefully, not randomly; that is, a particular person, site, program, process, community, or other bounded system is selected because it exhibits characteristics of interest to the researcher (Merriam, p. 179). This case study is of interest to the researcher because of the relationship between accreditation and that of quality in higher education.

Creswell (1998) identifies challenges confronting the researcher in case study development as: (1) identification of case; (2) consideration of studying single or multiple cases; (3) establishing rationale for purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the case and gathering information; (4) collecting enough information to present an in-depth picture; and (5) deciding the “boundaries” of the case (pp. 63-64).

## Research Design

Case study qualitative research procedures were employed to conduct the research on the review of the state accreditation process. Scholars espouse a variety of research designs from extremely flexible to a more structured approach. Bogden and Biklin (1992) referred to the “design” as the researcher’s “flexible” plan on how to proceed. They stated:

Qualitative researchers have a design; to suggest otherwise would be misleading. How they proceed is based on theoretical assumptions (that meaning and process are crucial to understanding human behavior, that descriptive data are what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively) and on data-collection traditions (such as participant observation, unstructured interviewing, and document analysis). It is not that qualitative research design is nonexistent; it is rather that the design is flexible. (p. 58)

A research design consists of the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting research. Creswell (2005) suggested a more structured approach in conducting case study research:

1. Identify your intent, the appropriate design, and how intent relates to your research problem.
2. Discuss approval and access considerations. Receive approval from institutional review board.
3. Use appropriate data collection procedures.
4. Analyze and interpret data within a design.
5. Write a report consistent with your design.

Yin (1989) recognized, “The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial interview questions, and ultimately, to its conclusions (p. 28). The colleges and professional groups provided the richest sources of dialog about how

they see accreditation and what they value in it. The results of the interviews provided many common themes regarding the accreditation process for both the state and the region. The two most prevalent themes were the state's commitment to quality and the concern to make the state accreditation process useful to all stakeholders.

A case study model utilizing an interpretive qualitative research design was used to review the state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. The design for the study is structured in the sense that it supports Creswell's procedures while allowing the researcher some flexibility within the process.

### **Site and Participation Selection**

Krathwohl (1998) defined "...gatekeepers as individuals who give approval to conduct a study, such as institution administrators, school boards, and department heads...can also be persons who approve the presentation of a study to an audience, such as editors and convention scheduling committees. He continued describing a gatekeeper as "...one with authority to give permission for entry" (p. 253). The gatekeeper can have the "insider" status at the site the researcher plans to study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

The case study research was approved by the Iowa Department of Education Chief Administrator for Community Colleges and Career and Technical Education and the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force which consisted of an administrator from each of Iowa's 15 community colleges, the IACCT administrator, a representative from NCA-HLC, and administrators from the DE. In this context, the DE Chief Administrator and the Taskforce served as the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers, along with the researcher's major

professor and program of study committee, approved the research design for the review of the state accreditation process.

Krathwohl (1998) described informants as persons selected for their sensitivity, knowledge, and insights into their situation, their willingness to talk about it, and their ability to provide access to new situations” (p. 264). A DE Bureau Chief and an Administrative Consultant in the Division for Community College and Career and Technical Education acted as informants.

When placed in context with regard to reporting acumen, the DE Administrative Consultant reports directly to the Bureau Chief, while the Bureau Chief reports directly to the Chief Administrator of the division. They supported the researcher in identifying the research problem and defining appropriate interview questions and sub-questions. They also served as gatekeepers in assisting the researcher to gain entry to individual and focus group interviews.

### **Purposeful sample**

During the summer of 2005, the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant had several conversations, both in person, by telephone and by e-mail to determine an appropriate sample for the case study. Following extensive conversation, it was decided to engage in purposeful sampling, a technique which seeks information rich cases (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Creswell (2005) suggested, “...purposeful sampling is a qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 204). Bogdan and Biklin (1992) supported purposeful sampling as a means to “...choose particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (pp. 71-72).

The state accreditation process has a significant impact on each of Iowa's 15 community colleges. From the early stages of the research design, the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force insisted that research be inclusive of all 15 community colleges. Early in the study, the researcher identified the individuals and professional groups that had the potential of being included in a purposeful sample for the research.

The Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force supported the fact that these individuals and professional groups would provide expertise and candor regarding the current state accreditation process. The initial purposeful sample included the following individuals and professional groups within the Iowa community college system; two community college presidents who served in an advisory capacity of the Task Force, an IACCT administrator, chief academic officers, chief student services officers, career and technical education deans, associate of arts/associate of science deans, faculty, institutional research directors, and librarians (see Figure 2).

Individual interviews were conducted with the two presidents and the IACCT administrator. Most of the purposeful sample was represented in focus group interviews. Krathwohl (1998) suggested, "Focus groups have been increasingly in use because, for some problems, they can yield almost the same information as individual interviews, are less expensive, and more quickly gather information from a sample of people" (p. 295).

### **Maximal variation sample**

The researcher obtained data from the DE that supported a significant trend in the number of Iowa's community colleges that had adopted or were in the process of adopting the AQIP process of accreditation. Nine of the colleges are committed to AQIP, while two



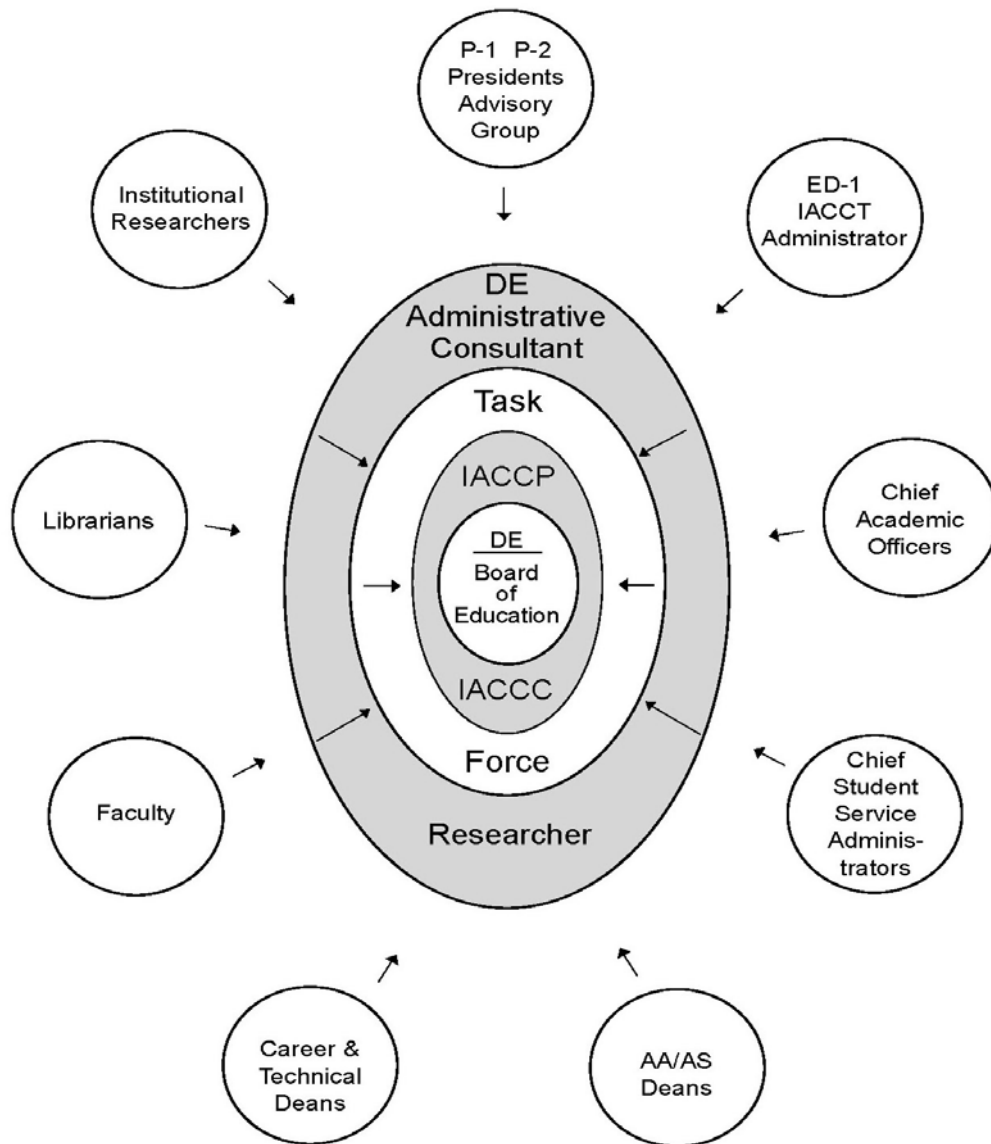


Figure 2. Purposeful sample of Iowa community college accreditation stakeholders<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The accreditation stakeholders include the purposeful sample, which provided secondary data for the research, the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force, the Iowa Community College Presidents (IACCP), the Iowa Community College Council (IACCC), the Department of Education (DE), and the State Board of Education.

colleges are transitioning to AQIP. The data also indicated that there are four community colleges that have chosen to go through and/or remain with the more traditional accreditation process, PEAQ.

In order to include a variety of perspectives on accreditation, the researcher employed a maximal variation sample which would enhance the initial purposeful sample by including perceptions from additional focus groups. Creswell (2005) stated, “Maximal variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait” (p. 204). In this case, five community colleges were selected for the maximal variation sample to represent a spectrum of philosophy toward the state accreditation process that reflects a range of viewpoints.

The researcher synthesized DE accreditation data in an effort to find a sampling that would represent a range of experience. At one end of the spectrum, a college was selected that had the most recent NCA-HLC accreditation visit under the traditional PEAQ process utilizing the new criteria. At the other end of the spectrum, a college was selected that had several years experience with the AQIP process. Three additional colleges were selected in the maximal variation sample that fell between these two points on the spectrum (see Table 1). Creswell (2005) suggested, “... we identify our participants and sites based on places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon” (p. 203).

A system was developed to track the interview process, which included determining a schedule and sites that would accommodate both samples. Krathwohl (1998) recognized that researchers preferred “...work in natural situations and seek explanations that the best understanding of what was observed” (p. 26). The site selections for the interviews were held

Table 1. Maximal variation sample accreditation status

College	Most recent state accreditation visit	Current NCA-HLC accreditation process	Most recent NCA-HLC accreditation activity
CC-1	2004	PEAQ	PEAQ visit completed: 2004
CC-2	2003	PEAQ	PEAQ visit completed: 2003
CC-3	2002	AQIP	1 <sup>st</sup> Strategy Forum: 2005
CC-4	2002	AQIP	1 <sup>st</sup> Strategy Forum: 2001 2 <sup>nd</sup> Strategy Forum: 2005
CC-5	2002	AQIP	1st Strategy Forum: 2000 2nd Strategy Forum: 2005

Note: The Strategy Forum, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolios, and Systems Appraisal are all integral AQIP processes. So, too, is reaffirmation of accreditation, which enables a college or university participating in AQIP to demonstrate its continued fulfillment of the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation. The Strategy Forum is a supportive, facilitated peer review process to help an organization select, critically examine and commit to a set of Action Projects that will drive quality improvement (Higher Learning Commission, 2005).

in natural settings (i.e., college campus's and the IACCT office). The system identified the sample, the interview site, researchers, and the date of the interview.

### Data Collection and Management

Poole (2002) stated "...research design and theoretical perspectives motivate data gathering approaches" (p. 47). Krathwohl (1998), Merriam (2002), and Creswell (2005) suggested that data can be gathered in a number of ways, utilizing a variety of data gathering techniques. They stated that the sources most widely used are observation and interviewing. They collectively support the analysis of documents and records as part of the data collection process.

Krathwohl (1998) contended that, "Qualitative data may be gathered in as many ways as the researcher's creativity permits" (p. 241). Creswell (2005) suggested that, for case study research, "...the intent is to develop an in-depth understanding of a case or an issue, and researchers collect as many types of data to develop this understanding as possible" (p. 452).

The researcher selected individual and focus group interviews, and analysis of documents and records obtained from the DE and NCA-HLC as the primary data collection instruments.

As referenced in the previous section, significant consideration was taken in the selection of the purposeful and the maximal variation samples, as well as determining sites for the interviews. The data collection process utilizing the purposeful sample continued to emerge. Krathwohl (1998) suggested, “Qualitative researchers typically begin their interviews and/or observations with a target of interest, but they are open to whatever emerges of significance and change their data collection accordingly” (p. 26).

The focus groups identified in the purposeful sample on account of size, level of attendance, time constraints, and knowledge of the research topic –accreditation – resulted in a more limited data set. Thus the researcher chose to utilize the data collected from the purposeful sampling focus groups as a secondary source of data.

Research interviews were conducted in accordance with the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board procedures. The interviews conducted with the presidents, IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample became the primary sources of data due to a more structured approach to data collection (see Figure 3). The maximal variation sample signed the appropriate forms when considering interview protocol. This was accompanied by a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix C). Additional questions emerged throughout the interview process. The interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length. The maximal variation sample interviews were conducted by the researcher. The DE Administrative Consultant accompanied the researcher to the interviews. Both the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant recorded field notes during the interviews. In one

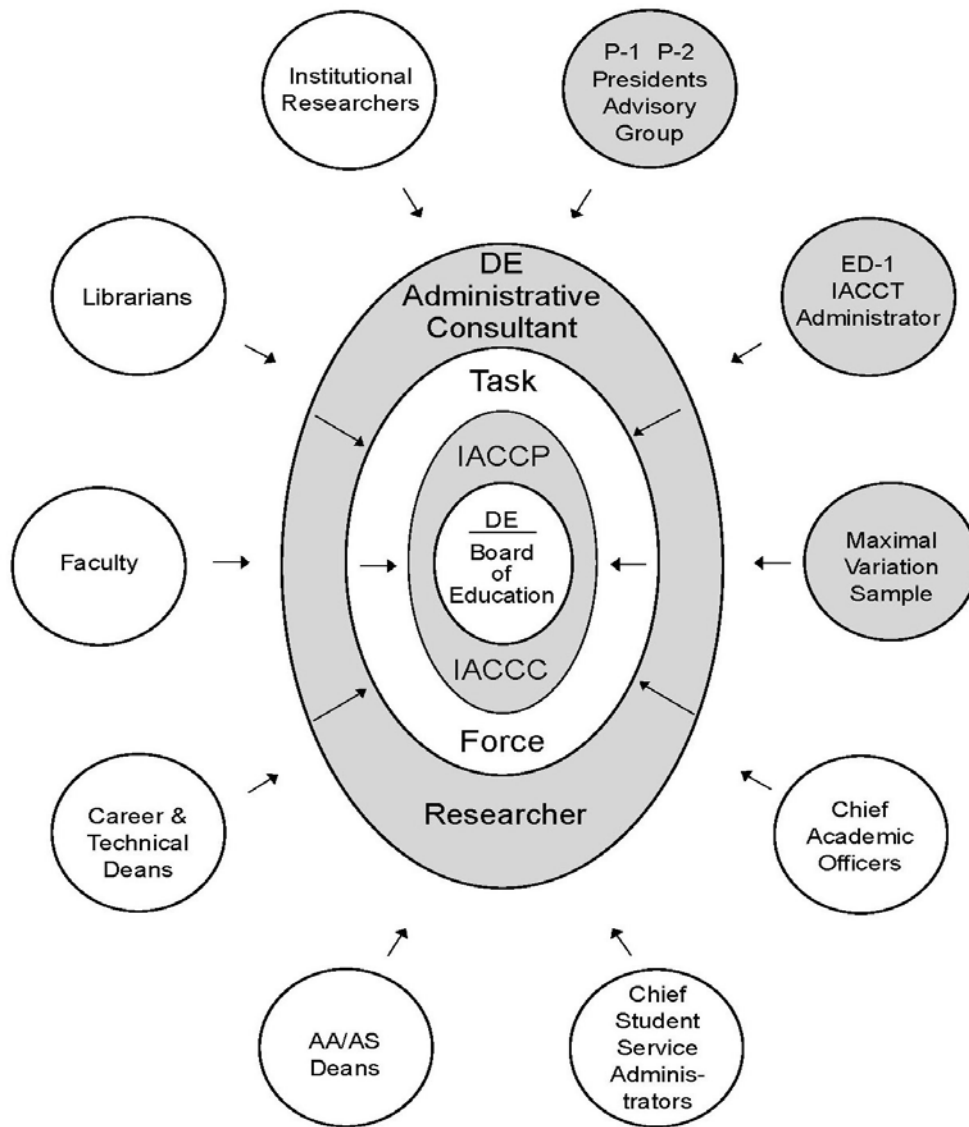


Figure 3. Maximal variation sample of Iowa community college accreditation stakeholders <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As the research progressed, a maximal variation sample was selected. This sample included five colleges that represented a range of viewpoints regarding accreditation. The maximal variation sample, the presidents' advisory group, and the IACCT administrator became the primary data source for the research.

instance, the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant were joined by the DE Bureau Chief.

Creswell (1998) recognized that, “A case study involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case (p. 123). The researcher also utilized analysis of documents and records in data collection for the research. Documents included memos, minutes from meetings, policy documents, e-mail messages and a journal. Creswell referenced the later two as “emergent forms of data collection” (p. 120). Bogdan and Biklin (1992) supported the use of documents and records as viable data. They suggested:

These materials have been viewed by many researchers as extremely subjective, representing biases of the promoters and, when written for external consumption, presenting an unrealistically glowing picture of how the organization functions. For this reason, many researchers consider them unimportant, excluding them as “data”. It is precisely *for* these properties (and others) that qualitative researchers look upon them favorably. (p. 136)

Krathwohl (1998) identified a range of interview styles as unstructured, partially structured, semi-structured, structured and totally structured. In a partially structured interview, “...questions are formulated but order is up to the interviewer. The interviewer may add questions or modify them as deemed appropriate. Questions are open-ended, and responses are recorded nearly verbatim, possibly taped” (p. 287). The researcher selected the partially structured interview process for the study.

The rationale behind this decision was that the researcher was concerned about building rapport with the individuals and focus groups being interviewed. Krathwohl (1998) suggested that, “No interview succeeds unless the interviewer builds a relationship with the respondent in which both are comfortable talking with one another.” He continued, “...the

ability to develop rapport at the same time one gets the information desired is one of the most important skills of the interviewer” (p. 290). The researcher recognized that rapport with the maximal variation sample would be positive since they were all actively engaged in the accreditation process on their college campuses. “Interviews are particularly useful in tracing causes, especially when these lie in the personal meanings of a common experience” (Krathwohl, p. 358).

The process essential to sound data management is recording information, or as Lofland and Lofland (1995) stated, “logging data” (p. 66). Creswell (1998) recognized, “This process involves recording information through various forms such as observational field notes, interview write-ups, mapping, census taking, photographing, sound recording, and collecting and organizing documents” (p. 128).

The researcher considered both tape recording and hand recording data collected in the interviews, realizing that tape recording and transcription of the tapes were the preferred method. The researcher believed that in this particular research, hand recorded data would result in developing a better rapport and the opportunity for richer dialog with the maximal variation sample, thus gaining more candid responses. The researcher was confident that hand recording would be accurate and could be adequately coded.

Following each interview, the researcher and DE Administrative Consultant would type and share their independent field notes with one another utilizing e-mail. The notes from both sources were similar in content. The researcher developed electronic files for data storage. The end result was a significant series of coded responses from the purposeful and maximal variation samples (see Appendix D). The researcher prepared these data for the coding process.

### **Analysis of the Data**

Merriam (2002) posited, "...data analysis is an inductive strategy. One begins with a unit of data (any meaningful word, phrase, narrative, etc.) and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data" (p. 14). Creswell (2005) recognized coding as an important component of data analysis and identifies it as a process offers two options; simultaneous or iterative. The researcher selected the simultaneous process for this study:

1. The researcher collects data (i.e., a text file, such as field notes, transcriptions, or optically scanned material).
2. The researcher prepares data for analysis (i.e., transcribed field notes).
3. The researcher reads through the data (i.e., obtains a general sense of the material).
4. The researcher codes the data (i.e., locates text segments and assigns a code label to them. (Creswell, p. 231)

The researcher employed the simultaneous coding process in reviewing the recorded data that were collected in the interviews. The simultaneous coding process supported the data analysis. Attention to coding enabled the researcher to identify multiple perspectives on a series of themes. Creswell (2005) identified several types of themes: ordinary themes, unexpected themes, hard to classify themes, major and minor themes.

Since findings in qualitative research are in the form of words rather than numbers, according to Merriam (2002), "...reports vary widely with regard to the ratio of supporting "raw" data included versus interpretation and analysis. The best guideline is whether enough data is in the form of quotes from interviews, episodes from field observations, or documentary evidence are presented to support adequately and convincingly the study's findings" (p. 15). Major and minor themes that were the result of the simultaneous coding process are reported in Chapter 4.



## Validity

Merriam (2002) promoted eight strategies for promoting validity and reliability in qualitative research. Internal validity strategies include triangulation, member checks, peer review/examination, researcher's position on reflexivity, and adequate engagement in data collection. External validity strategies include maximal variation and rich, thick descriptions. Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one person experiences (p. 27). The reliability strategy identified to support qualitative research was the audit trail. Creswell (1998) supported these strategies, referring to them as procedures and recommends that qualitative researchers "...engage in at least two of them in any given study" (p. 203). In this study, the researcher employed triangulation, member checks, peer review, adequate engagement in data collection, and maximal variation to assure validity.

## Triangulation

Triangulation is the most well known internal validity strategy. Foreman (1948) cited this procedure more than 50 years ago. He recommended using independent investigators, "...to establish validity through pooled judgment and using outside sources to validate case study materials" (p. 413). Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to triangulation as a way of life, "...if you self consciously collect and double check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the verification process will largely be built into the data collection as you go" (p. 267).

Merriam (1998) stated that in the most common triangulation strategy "...the researcher collects data through a combination of interviews, observations, and document

analysis (p. 25). Krathwohl (1998) compared triangulation to surveying, "...a property boundary can be established simply by measuring in the right direction from an established point, but it is more accurately found by using two established points as the baseline of a triangle to establish a third" (p. 275). The researcher employed triangulation throughout the period data were being collected from purposeful sample focus groups, maximal variation sample interviews, and document analysis.

### **Member check**

Another internal strategy to check validity is a member check. This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be "...the most critical techniques for establishing credibility" (p. 314). According to Stake (1995), participants should "...play a major role directing as well as acting in case study" research (p. 115). A member check (retreat) was conducted on December 7 and 8, 2005 at the West Campus of Des Moines Area Community College.

A minimum of one representative from each of the five colleges from the maximal variation sample was in attendance. The researcher, DE Administrative Consultant, and Bureau Chief facilitated the retreat. This provided the researcher an opportune time to review the data collected with members from the sample to check validity. In addition, at the retreat significant conversations that supported the initial changes to the draft of both the rules and the guide were initiated. The DE Administrative Consultant and the researcher began to rewrite the draft following the retreat.

### **Peer review**

Merriam (2002) suggested, "...a thorough peer examination would involve asking a colleague to scan some of the raw data and assess whether the findings are plausible based on the data" (p. 26). Creswell (1998) contended that peer review or debriefing provides an external check of the research process. Lincoln and Guba (1995) defined the role of the peer debriefer as the "devil's advocate", an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher's feelings. The researcher had the opportunity to work collaboratively with administrators from the DE throughout the study. They, in turn, provided a natural peer review. Data from interviews and documentation were shared and analyzed in face-to-face meetings, through telephone conversations, and the exchange of e-mails.

### **Engagement in data**

Scholars contend that engagement in data over a long period of time supports validity. Merriam (2002) suggested, "The best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is, you begin to hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data" (p. 26). Creswell (1998, p. 201) described this as prolonged engagement and persistent observation. In the field, the researcher makes decisions about what is salient to the study, relevant to the purpose of the study, and of interest for focus. The researcher spent one year immersed in the topic of accreditation which included well over two months in the field collecting data to support the findings that are identified in Chapter 4.

### **Maximal variation sample**

As referenced in the Site and Participant Selection section of this chapter, the external validity strategy employed in the research was maximal variation sampling. The logic behind this strategy as having a level of diversity in the nature of the sites selected or in participants interviewed, or times and places of field visits, results can be applied to a greater range of situations by readers or consumers of the research (Merriam, 2003). The five colleges selected to be part of this sample represented a range of viewpoints on accreditation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Research design strategies motivate responsibilities and accountability for the researcher as investigator, who gathers and analyzes the data with the intention of constructing meaningful information (Merriam, 1998). Poole believed that, “The researcher must be aware of personal and participant biases that may harm the validity of research endeavors” (p. 52).

Creswell (1998) recommended “...spending extensive time in the field, engage in the complex, time-consuming process of data analysis, write long passages, and participate in a form of social and human science research...and is evolving and changing constantly” (pp. 16-17). Krathwohl (1998) stressed, “Many qualitative methodologists stress letting the foreshadowed problem develop inductively, immediately starting the gathering of data in the area of interest with considerable openness and looseness of design” (p. 238). This enables the study to emerge during the course of the study rather than being targeted at the start.

Bogdan and Biklin (1992) described a cooperative researcher as one “...that generally believed that fieldworkers should be as truthful as possible with the subjects they studied” (p.

24). Creswell (2005) suggested that the qualitative researcher "...also seeks to present a persuasive story and often writes in a lively manner using metaphors, analogies, contradictions, and ironies (p. 270).

The researcher's task is to capitalize on strengths and avoid weaknesses. Krathwohl (1998) recognized "...qualitative researchers are judged by how insightfully they analyze their data, how well they present their interpretations, and how carefully and tightly they relate them to their information base" (p. 230). Creswell (2005) recognized the importance of balance in scholarly writing and recognizes the researcher should reflect that balance "...between conveying knowledge about research and knowledge about the subject matter of the study" (p. 270).

Creswell (2005) defined the participant observer as "...an observational role adopted by the researchers in which they take part in activities in the setting they observe" (p. 595). Garson (2006) outlined the empirical approach to participant observation and emphasizes participation as an opportunity for in-depth systematic study of a particular group or activity. He recognized the role of the researcher as participant observer is an investment in time, energy, and self, and as such it raises questions such as bias. Zelditch (1962) identified two approaches for participant observers. Informant interviewing is a way to establish social rules and statuses and participation to observe and detail illustrative incidents. The researcher in this case study assumed the role of researcher as participant observer.

### **Summary**

This study was designed to document and analyze the data to revise the existing state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. A thorough review of the literature that

supports qualitative research methods guided the study. Research methods employed in the study were identified in this chapter. Theoretical perspectives started with a broad orientation and were narrowed to the research process of the study. The researcher focused on theoretical perspectives which included qualitative research through an interpretive qualitative approach utilizing case study. The methods addressed in this section supported the findings identified in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This chapter takes the shape of a narrative discussion regarding the review of the state accreditation process. Creswell (2005) proposed the primary source for “...representing and reporting findings in qualitative research is in narrative discussion ... no set form for this narrative, which can vary widely from one study to another” (p. 249). Krathwohl (1998) referred to reporting qualitative case studies as “ideal for describing casual systems in ‘living color’ ” (p. 334). Stake (1995) suggested, “...we worry about having enough to say; before we know it, we have too much...an effective author who tells what is needed and leaves the rest to the reader” (p. 121).

Qualitative case study method was used to document and analyze the data used to revise the state accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges. A comprehensive evaluation of the data gathered through interviews, documentation, and the literature explained the findings that are presented in the following sections. Stakeholders referenced in this chapter are administrators from each of Iowa’s 15 community colleges, an IACCT administrator, a representative from the NCA-HLC, and administrators from the DE. These stakeholders joined in rich conversations throughout 2005 and into 2006 that resulted in data to support this study.

The introduction includes a descriptive account of the timeline that was established and the data collection processes that were employed. The researcher also provides a descriptive overview of the data collected from the maximal variation sample. In the following section major and minor themes are shared along with their relationship to the literature and responses of the maximal variation sample.

## Introduction

Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that conducts its own accreditation process for community colleges in addition to regional accreditation. Creation of processes for accrediting Iowa's community colleges was mandated by the state legislature in 1990, and the process was developed by the DE in the early 1990s.

Silag and Snyder (2006) suggested, “Accountability has been one of the fundamental purposes of community college accreditation in Iowa. State accreditation also confirms the quality of service provided by the community colleges to their various constituencies. In addition to accountability and quality, the designers of Iowa’s community college accreditation process intended that implementation of the process would encourage the colleges to increase their effectiveness” (p. 4:10). Effectiveness, in this context, means that each of the colleges would “continue developing the characteristics that make it unique and able to meet the needs of its constituents, yet meet reasonable standards set for all colleges” (Iowa Department of Education, 1991).

In February of 2005, the DE began a comprehensive review of the Iowa community college accreditation process. This revision was prompted by the NCA-HLC’s adoption of new accreditation criteria, which became effective January 1, 2005. In addition, the DE was beginning to see more community colleges transitioning from the traditional NCA-HLC accreditation process, PEAQ, to the AQIP process.

At the onset of the review of the accreditation process, the DE empowered the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force with the primary responsibility of overseeing the revision of the state accreditation process. Membership of the Task Force included an administrator from each of Iowa’s 15 community colleges, the IACCT administrator, a



representative from NCA-HLC, and administrators from the DE. An organizational meeting of the Task Force was held in February of 2005. Follow-up discussions of particular topics—including strategic planning, effective teaching, and community engagement—were conducted in the spring of 2005 by work teams made up of Task Force members and facilitated by the DE Administrative Consultant.

In May of 2005, the DE Chief Administrator for Community Colleges and Career and Technical Education and the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force, approved the researcher to conduct qualitative research utilizing a case study approach on the revision of the state accreditation process. The researcher came to the project with a sincere interest in learning more about accreditation from both the state and the NCA-HLC perspectives, with the intent of providing sufficient data that would revise the current process into one that most stakeholders would support. The researcher was assigned to be in direct contact throughout the process with the DE Administrative Consultant responsible for coordinating the revision process.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant worked collaboratively throughout the summer to develop a rigorous timeline for the review process that would be attainable by both the DE and the researcher (see Appendix E). The timeline fluctuated throughout the review process; however, target dates were adhered to in most instances. At the same time, through purposeful and maximal variation sampling techniques, they determined the sample that would provide the most reliable data to support the research.

The purposeful sample was identified as: chief academic officers, chief student services officers, career and technical education deans, associate of arts/associate of science deans, faculty, institutional research directors, and librarians. The researcher recognized that

these stakeholder groups would provide a valid sample due to the fact that they were perceived to have an interest in accreditation and that each group meets at least annually on a statewide basis which would accommodate scheduling individual and focus group interviews.

However, because of size, level of attendance, time constraints and knowledge of the research topic, data collection was limited to these stakeholder groups. The researcher chose to utilize the data collected from this sample as a secondary source of data. Primary data were collected from focus group interviews of the maximal variation sample, two presidents and, the IACCT administrator. These are included in a subsequent section in this chapter.

In addition to the identified purposeful and maximal variation samples, the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant provided an overview of the process and facilitated discussion regarding the review process at a general session of the annual DE Administrators Forum that was held in Ames, Iowa on October 13 and 14, 2005. Feedback from this session is also included as secondary data in this research.

Following the data collection period in the fall, the researcher coded the data for themes. In an effort to assure validity and continue to move the review process forward, a retreat was scheduled for December 7 and 8, 2005. The retreat was facilitated by the researcher, DE Administrative Consultant, and DE Bureau Chief. The researcher used the retreat as an opportunity to confirm the validity of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. As a member check, a minimum of one representative from each of the colleges that were in the maximal variation sample participated in the retreat.

The retreat also enabled the DE administrators, the researcher, and the participants an opportunity to begin to draft the revisions to the documents that support the accreditation

process. One significant ground rule regarding the revision was explained by the DE Bureau Chief. From the onset of the revision process, it was made known that there would not be a recommendation for changes to the language in the *Iowa Code*; however, changes to language in the Iowa Administrative Rules would be acceptable. The *Code of Iowa* (Vol. III, 2005) mandates, “The department of education shall adopt rules and definitions of term necessary for the administration of this chapter” (p. 2598). *Iowa Code* is the law, and the Iowa Administrative Rules explain how to implement the law. Whereas changes in rules are approved by the Iowa Administrative Rules Committee, changes to *Iowa Code* would entail legislative action.

Following the retreat the DE Administrative Consultant and the researcher, in her role as participant observer, wrote the initial revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules and the draft of the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*. The process consisted of the DE Administrative Consultant forwarding perceived changes in both documents to the researcher for input and clarification. Upon consensus, the initial draft was finalized and forwarded to the DE Chief Administrator and Bureau Chief for their approval.

The initial revisions consisted of the following changes to the documents:

1. Adopting the NCA-HLC criteria for accreditation as Iowa’s own;
2. Including the standards identified in the *State Code* to include, minimum faculty standards, faculty load, special needs, and vocational program review evaluation;
3. Identifying a crosswalk that aligns the nine AQIP criteria with the five NCA-HLC criteria – Appendix 5; (Guide only); and
4. Creating an evaluation rubric as – Appendix 6. (Guide only).

Following the approval of the DE senior administrators, the initial draft was submitted to the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force. On January 31, 2006, the Task Force approved the draft of the guide and rules with minor changes to include the following:

1. Examples of evidence have been reworded to align with the examples of evidence used by the NCA-HLC;
2. Language regarding graduate level coursework was eliminated;
3. Specific standards prescribed by the *Iowa Code* are set apart from the NCA-HLC criteria;
4. Conversations on planning and conducting state accreditation site visits were extended and will be re-visited at a later date;
5. Appendices were rearranged for clarity.

In March and April of 2006, the draft of the revised *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* (see Appendix F), which includes changes to the Iowa Administrative Rules, was shared for comment with the following stakeholder groups within the Iowa community college system; Iowa Association of Community College Presidents (IACCP), chief academic officers, chief student service officers, Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCT), and the Iowa Community College Council (ICCC).

The Iowa Community College Council serves as a conduit to the Iowa State Board of Education. The Council's function is to provide the Iowa State Board of Education with information and recommendations for action on issues regarding Iowa's community colleges that are brought to the State Board of Education. The Council membership consists of four State Board of Education members, one community college president, one community

college trustee, and the Executive Director of the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees.

The revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules (Appendix G) were reviewed by the DE Bureau Chief and the DE Administrative Consultant with the Iowa State Board of Education on May 11, 2006. No written comments were received on the proposed revisions. The revisions were approved by the Iowa Administrative Rules Committee on July 11, 2006. The Iowa State Board of Education officially voted in favor of the amended rules at their meeting on July 27, 2006.

### **Maximal Variation Sample**

The researcher obtained data from the DE which supported a significant trend in the number of Iowa's community colleges that had adopted or were in the process of adopting the AQIP process of accreditation. Nine of the colleges were committed to AQIP, while two colleges were in the process of transitioning to AQIP. The data also indicated that four community colleges had chosen to go through and/or remain with the more traditional accreditation process, PEAQ.

In order to include a variety of perspectives on accreditation, the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant agreed to employ a maximal variation sample which would enhance the initial purposeful sample by including perceptions from additional focus groups. Creswell (2005) stated, "Maximal variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait" (p. 204). In this case, five community colleges were selected for the maximal variation

sample to represent a spectrum of philosophy toward the state accreditation process that reflects a range of viewpoints.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant synthesized DE accreditation data in an effort to find a sample that that would represent a range of experience. At one end of the spectrum, a college was selected that had the most recent NCA-HLC accreditation visit under the traditional PEAQ process utilizing the new criteria. At the other end of the spectrum, a college was selected that had several years experience with the AQIP process. Three additional colleges were selected in the maximal variation sample that fell between these two points on the spectrum. Creswell (2005) suggested, "...we identify our participants and sites based on places and people that can best help us understand our central phenomenon" (p. 203).

The following section provides background information for each individual or focus group included in the maximal variation sample, along with an in-depth account of each interview. Coded responses were taken directly from the notes taken during the interviews by the researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant (see Appendix D). The coded responses were interchangeable throughout this study:

Community College President 1: P – 1

Community College President 2: P – 2

Iowa Association of Community College Trustee (IACCT) administrator: ED

Community College 1: CC – 1

Community College 2: CC – 2

Community College 3: CC – 3

Community College 4: CC – 4

Community College 5: CC – 5

### **Community College President 1**

Community College President 1 (P – 1) served as an advisory member of the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force and was extremely supportive of the review process. P – 1’s tenure in higher education has been with the same rural college. P – 1 has enjoyed steady advancement within the institution moving from faculty to chief academic officer to president. P – 1 has a historical perspective of the accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges. She stated, *“I was a member of the CAO group that developed the initial state criteria in 1991”* (P – 1, p. 13). She is an advocate of accreditation and recognizes that *“It is more helpful to an institution to keep accreditation at the forefront”* (P – 1, p. 13).

P – 1 led a rural community college that has a rich history in college transfer and vocational technical programs. It also has a comprehensive program of adult and continuing education. The community college began operation in 1966. The community college inherited the facilities and instructional programs of the community’s college which had been operated by the public school system since 1926.

At the time of the interview, P – 1 informed the researcher, *“My college is preparing for our PEAQ site visit in April of 2006. There is an internal discussion to move to AQIP following our PEAQ review”* (P – 1, p. 13). She went on to suggest, *“Currently accreditation is viewed as an assignment. The college gets a grade and then any further consideration of process go away”* (P – 1, p. 13).

P – 1 was supportive of the state accreditation review process and expressed, *“My preference is for the state to come prior to NCA. I don’t think the state needs to make an annual visit”* (P – 1, p. 13). P – 1 also indicated that the current *“State crosswalk has been*

*helpful as we have prepared for our PEAQ visit” (P – 1, p. 13). P – 1 supports, “The state accreditation process and the NCA-HLC process should be as closely aligned as possible” (P – 1, p.13).*

### **Community College President 2**

Community College President 2 (P – 2) served as an advisory member of the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force and was extremely supportive of the review process. P – 2 was an NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluator with administrative experience identified as chief executive officer and chief academic officer or provost and identified other experience as governance, boards of trustees and budget/planning. P – 2 had been president of an urban Iowa community college that experienced unprecedented growth.

P – 2’s community college was established in 1965. The college serves seven counties with the college having operations in five sites. Currently, the college offers 84 different vocational/technical programs and Arts and Science transfer majors. The college also offers an extensive continuing education program.

P – 2’s institution has recently transitioned to the AQIP process and is in the early stages of implementation. P – 2 contended, *“What colleges are being evaluated on are the five new criteria of the NCA-HLC. PEAQ and AQIP are the processes that a college can choose to affirm that they are addressing the criteria” (P – 2, p. 17).* P – 2 stated, *“Accreditation flows from your mission statement” (P – 2, p. 17).*

P – 2 expressed concerns regarding the perceived importance of accreditation for Iowa’s Community College. He recognized, *“President’s have not been interested in this issue. They have delegated to others who don’t have experience” (P – 2, p.17).* He was



concerned, *“New presidents don’t have a clue about the Higher Learning Commission’s expectations”* (P – 1, p. 17).

P – 2 suggested the state, *“Look at the Iowa criteria against the HLC criteria”* (P – 2, p. 17), and stated that Iowa, *“Use the same terminology for HLC and Iowa”* (P – 2, p. 18). P – 2 went on to state, *“The process should include patterns of evidence and compliance”* (P – 2, p. 18). P – 2 was in support of the review process and felt that the responsibility of the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force is, *“Create a draft from the Task Force and the President’s can see the output”* (P – 2, p. 18). He affirmed, *“Accreditation is about what the institution is doing”* (P – 2, p. 17).

### **IACCT Administrator (ED)**

The IACCT Administrator (ED) who served on the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force had a long tenure with Iowa community colleges, retiring from a presidency in the mid 1990’s. Following retirement, he assumed his responsibilities with IACCT. The mission of IACCT is to provide leadership in developing, strengthening and coordinating efforts to promote educational interests in Iowa and to provide a forum for issues affecting access, excellence and effectiveness of Iowa’s public community colleges.

ED recognized that the *“DE and the colleges are concerned with quality”* (ED, p. 15). In reference to accreditation, the IACCT administrator suggested, *“Increase communication on quality – if they get it at all, they will understand how important it is”* (ED, p. 15). He also legitimized the process and emphasized, *“Legislators said we need the state accreditation process”* (ED, p. 15).

ED reflected on past personal experience with the accreditation process, *“The president is the coordinator of the self study”* (ED, p. 15). In his experience, *“Accreditation serves as an internal morale booster. My former college had a successful ten year accreditation which I feel helped support a successful bond levy”* (ED, p. 15). He also provided insight into the involvement of other higher education entities formerly involved with the process, *“Regents wanted off the state accreditation committee”* (ED, p. 16).

ED believed that, *“The state accreditation process is an important process”* (ED, p. 15). He recognized that *“The state accreditation process gives the DE and the colleges’ perspective”* (ED, p. 15), and that *“Colleges receive value in going through the process”* (ED, p. 15). ED was indifferent toward the NCA-HLC processes, and indicated that *“I have heard no conversation among presidents regarding the AQIP/PEAQ preference”*(ED, p. 15). However, he affirmed, *“I do hear comments regarding the necessity of the state accreditation process”* (ED, p. 15). *“It is important to dovetail the state accreditation process with NCA”* (ED, p. 15).

### **Community College 1 (CC – 1)**

Community College – 1 (CC – 1) is a rural single campus facility. Total population in its service area is under 70,000. It was established as a pilot project in 1966 with an emphasis in offering technical programs. Over the past 40 years CC – 1 has evolved into a comprehensive community college that offers quality career and technical programs, arts and science transfer programs, and maintains a strong continuing education and business and industry division.

CC – 1 is a public institution that received its most recent accreditation from the NCA-HLC and the DE in the fall of 2004. The college has articulation agreements with the Iowa Regent Universities, as well as other accredited public and private colleges and universities locally, regionally and nationally.

According to the DE's Iowa Community College Fall Credit Student Enrollment Report (2005), CC – 1 had credit enrollments which comprised 1.32% of total credit enrollments in Iowa's community colleges for that same period. According to the same report, CC – 1 reported total credit hours which comprised 1.37% of total credit hours reported for this same period. Credit programs include courses in which students can earn an associate degree, diploma or certificate, achieve personal development, and/or upgrade job related skills.

The college took pride in tailoring both long and short-term courses to meet the needs of individuals, businesses and industries. Non-credit offerings included, but were not limited to, personal enhancements, basic skills, ESL, soft skill building, and technical skill building for the workforce.

CC – 1 values accreditation and has two administrators, the President and Vice President for Instruction and Learning Services, who are NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluators. The NCA-HLC cited the Presidents administrative experience as director of community services, chief executive officer, and director of a branch campus and other experience to include, business and industry training, academic affairs and budget/planning. The NCA-HLC cited the Vice President's administrative experience as chief academic officer or provost, director of community services, and director of developmental services and other experience in business/financial, admissions/recruitment, and business/industry.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant interviewed the team organized by the College President on October 19, 2005, from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. in the CC – 1 Board Room. The following were included, by invitation from the President, to participate in the focus group: President, Vice President of Finance and Support, Vice President of Instruction and Learning Services, Dean of Trade and Technologies, and Dean of Business, Health and Arts and Science. The morning of the interview, CC – 1 was notified that they had just received a major grant from the United States Department of Labor. This exciting news, however, prompted the President and Vice President of Instruction and Learning Services to be in and out throughout the interview process.

The administrative team was well versed on the topic of accreditation as all members in the interview, with the exception of the President, had recently been through successful NCA-HLC and DE accreditation visits in 2004. CC – 1 was one of the first colleges to utilize the new criteria with the PEAQ process. One member of the team supported, *“The purpose of accreditation is process improvement”* (CC – 1, p. 1), while another added, *“Accreditation is a process we have to complete”* (CC – 1, p.1), and still another recognized, *“Accreditation supports improvement of instruction”* (CC – 1, p. 1).

They all agreed, *“It was a very conscious decision not to go to AQIP due to the amount of work, staff and expense”* (CC -1, p. 1). They were currently in a transition phase, *“Realize that within a period of time after PEAQ accreditation, you have an opportunity to go through the essential steps for AQIP”* (CC – 1, p. 1). CC – 1 realized that *“More people are transitioning to AQIP”* (CC – 1, p. 2). However, they shared that, before any future direction for accreditation was determined, *“The college is currently going through a presidential transition and are allowing the new president to get settled”* (CC – 1, p. 1).

CC – 1 did not reference accreditation as a measure of their mission. They agreed that *“We measure our mission by voter approval, employer satisfaction, contributions to the Foundation, graduation rate, and time devoted to really good institutional research”* (CC – 1, p. 2). However, they resoundingly supported, *“Accreditation is a good step – it challenges us to look where we were, where we are, and where we are going”* (CC – 1, p. 2). One administrator went on to state, *“Quality improvement is the goal”* (CC – 1, p. 2).

Conversation turned to the importance of assessment of student learning and its relationship to the accreditation process. One administrator stated, *“Right now we do not have to address assessment of student learning and curriculum based on comments from the 2004 NCA visit”* (CC – 1, p. 1). Comments supported more integration between accreditation, program review and assessment of student learning. One administrator recommended that, *“We need to be more integrated – five year program review, assessment, accreditation”* (CC – 1, p. 2), while another felt that, *“Accreditation, assessment, and program review processes should be flowing”* (CC – 1, p. 2).

CC – 1 has maintained strong relationships with the DE and insisted that *“The state visit assisted us before the official NCA visit”* (CC – 1, p.2), and *“The state visit assists in areas where we need help”* (CC – 1, p. 2). They also recognized that, *“The difference between DE and NCA accreditation processes is that the DE recognizes non-credit and NCA does not”* (CC – 1, p .1). All members of the CC – 1 focus group supported, *“We would be comfortable for the state to adopt the NCA criteria along with those areas required by the code”* (CC – 1, p. 2).

They made several suggestions regarding the future involvement from the DE regarding the state accreditation process to include:

1. *“The DE could assist colleges as they know what the accreditation hot buttons are”* (CC – 1, p. 2);
2. *“The DE carry the news on information or direction on how the accreditation process is moving”* (CC – 1, p.2);
3. *“Provide a set of definitions with the revised criteria”* (CC – 1, p.2);
4. *“Report accreditation issues to Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Chief Student Service Officers, and Deans”* (CC – 1, p.2);
5. *“The DE Annual Administrator’s Conference could include best practices”* (CC – 1, p.2).

### **Community College 2 (CC – 2)**

Community College – 2 (CC – 2) is located in a community of 30,000, which serves an active business center for its service area. CC – 2 was formed in 1966 in compliance with laws enacted by the 1965 Iowa Legislature which provided the delivery of post secondary education in Iowa. CC – 2 maintains a long history as a two-year college in Iowa and one of the earliest in the country, having been established in 1918 by the local independent school district.

CC – 2 is a public institution that received its most recent accreditation from the NCA-HLC and the DE in 2003. The college has articulation agreements with the Iowa Regent Universities, as well as other accredited public and private colleges and universities locally, regionally and nationally. CC – 2 takes pride in the processes employed to assist student in seamless transition to other colleges and universities.

According to the DE’s Iowa Community College Fall Credit Student Enrollment Report (2005), CC – 2 had credit enrollments which comprised 3.67% of total credit enrollments in Iowa’s community colleges for that same period. According to the same report, CC – 2 had total credit hours which comprised 3.97% of total credit hours reported for

this same period. Credit programs include courses in which students can earn an associate degree, diploma or certificate, achieve personal development, and/or upgrade job related skills.

CC- 2 partners with local communities and their school districts and has five outreach centers for delivery of continuing education classes. CC – 2’s business and industry group has collaborated with local development groups to provide quality business and industry training to their area.

CC – 2 supports the value of accreditation and has one administrator, the Vice President for Academic Affairs who is an NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluator. The NCA-HLC cited the Vice President’s administrative experience as chief personnel officer, chief planning officer, and director of institutional research with academic experience in political science, and other experience in budget/planning, program evaluation, and assessment of student academic achievement.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant interviewed the team organized by the College President on February 9, 2006, from 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. in the CC – 2 Board Room. The interview for CC – 2 had been originally scheduled for November of 2005, however, due to inclement weather conditions; the interview was rescheduled for the later date. The following were included by invitation from the President to participate in the focus group: President and Vice President of Academic Affairs.

The administrative team was well versed on the topic of accreditation. Both administrators agreed that, “*Accreditation is extremely valuable and very useful*” (CC – 2, p. 4). They supported, “*Accreditation provides a broader way of thinking about yourself*”

(CC – 2, p. 4). The president recognized that, institutionally, *“Accreditation gets everybody on the same page”* (CC – 2, p. 4).

CC – 2 completed their last formal accreditation in 2003 under the traditional criteria and PEAQ process. CC – 2 offered, *“Down the path we are looking at AQIP”* (CC – 2, p. 3). Their statement that, *“We have talked about many AQIP processes”* (CC – 2, p. 3), was supported by the fact that, *“Our institution has a history of implementing continuous quality improvement (CQI) methodology”* (CC – 2, p. 3). They agreed that CC – 2’s *“Future choice would be toward quality improvement”* (CC – 2, p. 3).

The President, referring to his former position as vice president of academic affairs at CC – 2, shared an example of assessing quality in the rigor of CC – 2’s post-secondary education option program. He shared, *“An example of a quality process was the 1992 High School Partnership process. The question was, Can you prove the rigor of PSEO to the college president? The following quality measures were monitored; quality control studies – compare and contrast high school with campus data; show the high school control group; top 1/3 of class go onto PSEO; track ACT/ITEDS; and match pair designs”* (CC – 2, p. 3). He encouraged, *“Use data to improve”* (CC – 2, p. 3).

CC – 2 defined general education as a collection of diverse experiences in learning that teach generalized skills in communication, critical analysis, research, global awareness, interpersonal relations, aesthetics, math, and technology and survey subject matter to allow for applications of this learning in the classroom and community. The administration of CC – 2 was committed to general education and recognized, *“There has been an improvement in general education and program review”* (CC – 2, p. 3).



CC – 2 was extremely receptive to *“Colleagues in Iowa coming on campus is more beneficial because they know more about the colleges”* (CC – 2, p. 3). Both administrators supported, *“Peer review most valuable for the Iowa team”* (CC – 2, p. 3). The president recalled that, *“The 1989 process was quite divergent from NCA”* (CC – 2, p. 3). Both administrators recognized, *“The state accreditation process needs to align with NCA”* (CC – 2, p. 3). In reference to state standards, they agreed, *“Supplemental information needs to be added because it is not under NCA”* (CC – 2, p. 3).

At the conclusion of the interview, two concerns were expressed regarding the state strategic plan for community colleges and equity. With regards to the strategic plan, the President stated, *“There is a problem with the state strategic plan. It is hard to get 15 colleges to come together to agree on a major plan that will make a difference”* (CC – 2, p. 4). He supported the DE regarding their position on equity, *“Equity is a compliance issue and the DE has a right to check these initiatives”* (CC – 2, p. 4).

### **Community College 3 (CC – 3)**

Community College – 3 (CC – 3) was established in 1966. It is a multi-campus college that serves the constituencies in six counties. It was initially established as an area vocational-technical school. Over the past 40 years, CC – 3 has evolved into a comprehensive community college that offers over 40 quality career and technical and college transfer programs, and maintains a strong continuing education and business and industry division.

According to the DE’s Iowa Community College Fall Credit Student Enrollment Report (2005), CC – 3 had credit enrollments which comprised 6.56 % of total credit

enrollments in Iowa's community colleges for that same period. According to the same report, CC – 1 had total credit hours which comprised 5.83 % of total credit hours reported for this same period. Credit programs include courses in which students can earn an associate degree, diploma or certificate, achieve personal development, and/or upgrade job related skills.

In addition to its credit offerings, CC – 3 takes pride in tailoring both long- and short-term courses to meet the needs of individuals, businesses and industries. Non-credit offerings include, but are not limited to, personal enhancements, basic skills, ESL, soft skill building, and technical skill building for the workforce.

CC – 3 is a public institution that received its most recent accreditation from the NCA-HLC and the DE in 2002. The college has articulation agreements with the Iowa Regent Universities, as well as other accredited public and private colleges and universities locally, regionally and nationally.

CC – 3 supported the value of accreditation and had one administrator, the President, who was an NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluator. The NCA-HLC cited the Presidents administrative experience as chief executive officer, chief academic officer or provost, and director of a branch campus, with academic experience in engineering technology and industrial technology; and administrative experience in governance, academic affairs and boards of trustees.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant interviewed the team organized by the College President on October 19, 2005, from 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the CC – 3 Board Room. The following were included by invitation from the President to participate in

the focus group: President, Vice President of Academics/AQIP Contact, and two Associate Deans of Instruction.

CC – 3 has had a long history of involvement with quality initiatives in higher education. All administrators were in agreement that, “*A quality agenda encompasses all*” (CC – 3, p. 5). The president acknowledged that, “*CC – 3 is also a member of Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQN). The College was recognized as a CQN Pacesetter along with another Iowa Community College*” (CC – 3, p. 5). The president identified college quality priorities as “*Colleges quality agenda is CQN primary, accreditation/AQIP secondary*” (CC – 3, p. 5). CC – 3 also had experience with the Baldrige process. The president stated that, “*It is important for quality efforts to supply college with a different set of lenses*” (CC – 3, p. 5).

CC – 3 recently made the transition from PEAQ to AQIP, citing “*April of 2002 was the last formal visit under the traditional criteria*” (CC – 3, p. 5). The College president felt that at the end of their PEAQ visit the college needed to start exploring the option on transitioning to AQIP. He stated, “*It took the college three years to decide which direction they wanted their future accreditation to go*” (CC – 3, p. 5).

The Vice President shared that a college team, “*... returned from the Strategy Forum in Chicago and will finalize their Action Projects by December. Our Action Projects are: Communications, Curriculum, and Advising Architecture (on-line and face to face)*” (CC – 3, p. 5). The president suggested, “*PEAQ appears to be more reflective, whereas AQIP is more forward thinking*” (CC – 3, p. 5). He also offered, “*AQIP encourages organizations to move forward and will help to keep accreditation on the radar screen*” (CC – 3, p. 6).

One of the Associate Deans suggested, *“Our quality agenda is now a quality journey. People come together to participate in dialog. There is a renewed/reinvigorated sense of quality initiatives”* (CC – 3, p. 6). The Vice President stated, *“I ultimately see the state accessing the college website on an annual basis for System Portfolio and Action Project results”* (CC – 3, p. 6). The administration agreed, *“The quality agenda has its ups and downs”* (CC – 3, p. 5). However, they believed, *“The college has done a better job of planning as a result of the Conversation Day”* (CC – 3, p. 5).

The Vice President recognized that the AQIP process encourages inclusions and that *“Faculty representation on the AQIP Steering Committee is important”* (CC – 1, p. 5). CC – 3 indicated that *“ASAP – Awesome Special Action Projects was a model that was borrowed from another Iowa AQIP community college”* (CC – 3, p.5). There appeared to be some level of frustration regarding AQIP, *“A concern with AQIP is that there is not a lot of underlying architecture. In Chicago we seem to swim around AQIP. Start with three Action Projects that fold into a System’s Portfolio”* (CC – 3, p. 5).

Administration agreed that, *“We shouldn’t let accreditation drive the organization”* (CC – 3, p.6). *“On one hand, Accreditation is voluntary; we do not have to be accredited. On the other hand accreditation is necessary. There are important things you can’t access without it”* (CC – 3, p. 6). In support, they stated, *“Accreditation is a minimum entry into the larger arena of higher education”* (CC – 3, p. 6). The president offered, *“Accreditation provides a framework for president, board, stakeholders to say you are doing what you are doing”* (CC – 3, p. 6).

Regarding the state process, the president insisted, *“I would like to see the same accreditation process as privates and Regent institutions”* (CC – 3, p. 6). He went on to state,

*“I don’t know what benefit state accreditation has” (CC – 3, p. 6). However, administration recognized, “The state needs to work with the prescriptive aspect. There are additional standards from the state. There is a difference between changing state code and changing rules” (CC – 3, p. 6).*

The group appreciated the state accreditation, *“Practice session for NCA visit,”* and requested that the state, *“Develop some sort of structure that works for us” (CC – 3, p. 6).* They also indicated, *“We are okay with the assessment process running through accreditation” (CC – 3, p. 6).* It was suggested, *“The state should create an appropriate model without being prescriptive” (CC – 3, p. 6).*

The concluding comment from the president was, *“Make HLC and state criteria the same. If there must be a process for the state of Iowa, it should be that same for the state as it is for the HLC That will provide the community colleges with what they need to conduct their quality journeys, based on their own architecture of quality” (CC – 3, p. 6).* In jest, he suggested, *“Take the same accreditation report. Copy it. Put ‘NCA Administrative Consultant Name’ cover page on one and a ‘DE Administrative Consultant Name’ cover page on the other” (CC – 3, p. 6).*

#### **Community College 4 (CC – 4)**

Community College – 4 (CC – 4) is a rural multi campus community college that was established in 1967. CC – 4 has three centers located in south central Iowa. Total population in its service area is just under 100,000 people. The mission of CC – 4 is based on the 12 points that govern community colleges, taken verbatim from the *Code of Iowa*. CC – 4 provides career education and career option programs, as well as college transfer degrees

allowing students to obtain credit that will transfer to public and private four year institutions. In addition, the district provides non-credit programming which includes training for business and industry and hundreds of non-credit programs and services in cooperation with community school districts and other organizations.

CC – 4 is a public institution that is accredited by the NCA-HLC and the DE. They have been one of the state forerunners for implementing the AQIP accreditation process. The college has articulation agreements with the Iowa Regent Universities, as well as other accredited public and private colleges and universities locally, regionally, and nationally.

According to the DE's Iowa Community College Fall Credit Student Enrollment Report (2005) CC – 4 had credit enrollments which comprised 3.18 % of total credit enrollments in Iowa's community colleges for that same period. According to the same report, CC – 4 reported total credit hours which comprised 3.76% of total credit hours reported for this same period. Credit programs include courses in which students can earn an associate degree, diploma or certificate, achieve personal development, and/or upgrade job related skills.

The researcher and the DE Administrative Consultant interviewed the team organized by the College President on October 25, 2005, from 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. in the CC – 4 President's Office. The following were included by invitation from the President to participate in the focus group: President, Chief Academic Officer, and the AQIP Coordinator/Web Director.

CC – 4 is committed to quality. One administrator stated, *"We are a Baldrige School – Institution with a Total Quality Management (TQM) effort"* (CC – 4, p. 7). Another reflected, *"We wanted quality to become part of our culture. There is a commitment to*

*continuous quality improvement*” (CC – 4, p. 8). The administrators agreed that *“People want to see results on how we improve educational processes”* (CC – 4, p. 8). They supported *“Accreditation was promised as an extension of TQM”* (CC – 4, p. 8). One member acknowledged, *“Accreditation and accountability are what I am committed to”* (CC – 4, p. 8). The president recognized that, *“We’re doing really good work and that is what we are going to continue to keep doing”* (CC – 4, p. 7).

The AQIP Coordinator provided the following history, *“The last PEAQ accreditation action was in 1996: At that time, the district came together to be accredited as a single entity. Accreditation now includes the two district colleges that prior to 1996 were separately-accredited institutions: one which was first accredited in 1963 and one that was first accredited in 1966”* (CC – 4, p. 7). The administrator’s insisted that *“Quality management tools drove institution to AQIP”* (CC – 4, p. 8). They agreed that *“AQIP causes us to be more efficient”* (CC – 4, p.8). AQIP consists of a concentration of systems and processes (see Table 2). With acceptance into the program, reaffirmation occurs after seven years.

CC – 4 initially identified the following AQIP Action Projects: assessing effectiveness in student learning and stakeholder satisfaction, improving data collection and usability at IVCCD, and incorporating vision/mission/core values into leadership and decision-making processes. New Action Plans have been added to include: improving student and stakeholder satisfaction at IVCCD, integrating assessment processes/indicators for academic learning and core effectiveness, and getting to know you: implementing a district-wide diversity plan. Administrators confirmed, *“We employ ASAP – Awesome Special Action*

Table 2. CC – 4 AQIP accreditation cycle

Process	Timeline
Admission to AQIP	September 2000
1st Strategy Forum	August 2001
AQIP Systems Portfolio Completion	November 2004
AQIP Systems Portfolio Team Review	March 2005
2nd Strategy Forum	October 2005
Year of Next Reaffirmation of Accreditation	2007 – 2008
Year of Next System Appraisal	2008 – 2009
HLC Annual Institutional Data Update	Annually in April 2000 – 2006
Action Project Annual Update	Annual Reviews 2000 – 2006

Note: The Strategy Forum, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolios, and Systems Appraisal are all integral AQIP processes. So, too, is reaffirmation of accreditation, which enables a college or university participating in AQIP to demonstrate its continued fulfillment of the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation (Higher Learning Commission, 2005).

*Projects*” (CC – 4, p. 8). The AQIP Coordinator shared that the college “*Can drop Action Plans at any time – succeeded by events*” (CC – 4, p. 8).

Although the five new criteria identified by the NCA-HLC align with AQIP’s nine criteria, the AQIP Coordinator noted, “*The System’s Portfolio is so comprehensive it needs to cross over nine criteria*” (CC – 4, p. 7). The administrators agreed, “*The System’s Portfolio makes us a better school*” (CC – 4, p. 8). They stated that they were open to sharing data and keeping all “*...college facts, resources and the System’s Portfolio on the website*” (CC – 4, p. 8). CC – 4 included data from “*National Community College Benchmark Project through Johnson County Community College and the Community College Survey on Student Engagement as part of the portfolio*” (CC – 4, p. 8). They supported the college strategic plan by pulling data from the portfolio. They added, “*Accreditation is on the Executive Council agenda regularly*” (CC – 4, p. 8).



CC – 4 administrators stated, *“The state process was a good front runner to NCA”* (CC – 4, p. 9). They recognized that currently there was *“No state AQIP”* process (CC – 4, p. 8). They agreed, *“State accreditation validates what the state wants you to do”* (CC – 4, p. 9). They indicated, *“Worst thing the state could do is list their own set of criteria”* (CC – 4, p. 7). They suggested that the state *“Write a crossover to the state criteria”* (CC – 4, p.7). In addition, they perceived *“State accreditation should compliment the quality faculty plan and minimum standards”* (CC – 4, p. 9). They were creative in the sense that they suggested a *“...tenth criteria should be state issues/state strategic plan”* (CC – 4, p. 9).

### **Community College 5 (CC – 5)**

Community College District – 5 (CC – 5) was established in 1965 as one of the state’s 15 community colleges. The move combined two junior colleges and the technical programs from a local school district. In 1979, the district acquired another junior college to offer credit programs. In addition, many students participate in continuing education and retraining programs through the district’s business and industry center.

The district’s mission is to provide accessible quality educational programs and services which anticipate and respond to personal and community needs and expectations. These efforts will reflect an active commitment to excellence, to lifelong learning and to cooperation with all segments of the community.

CC – 5 is the first Iowa community college to transition to the AQIP process of accreditation through the NCA-HLC. The college has articulation agreements with the Iowa Regent Universities, as well as other accredited public and private colleges and universities locally, regionally, and nationally.

According to the DE's Iowa Community College Fall 2005 Credit Student Enrollment Report, CC – 5 had credit enrollments which comprised 8.89% of total credit enrollments in Iowa's community colleges for that same period. According to the same report, CC – 5 had total credit hours which comprised 8.65% of total credit hours reported for this same period. Credit programs include courses in which students can earn an associate degree, diploma or certificate, achieve personal development, and/or upgrade job related skills.

CC – 5 supports the value of accreditation and has one administrator, the Director of Institutional Research that is an NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluator. The NCA-HLC cites the Director's administrative experience as chief planning officer; her academic experience is in English, language, and literature, journalism/mass media/humanities; and other experience in total quality management, academic affairs, and assessment of student and academic achievement.

The researcher, DE Administrative Consultant, and Bureau Chief interviewed the team organized by the College President on October 26, 2005, from 2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. in the CC – 5 President's Office. The following were included by invitation from the District President to participate in the focus group: District President, Campus President, and the Director of Institutional Research/AQIP Coordinator.

CC – 5 has a rich history of engagement in initiatives that support quality in higher education. Administrators agreed, "*People in the community sit up and take respect when you look at quality*" (CC – 5, p. 12). The Director of Institutional Research added, "*In 1992 we started CQI creating a quality culture, training and leadership*" (CC – 5, p. 11). The administrators referenced that, recently, "*Fifteen individuals went to the national CQN*

*Conference*” (CC – 5, p. 11). CC – 5 has been affiliated with the Baldrige process in the past, however, she noted that they are beginning to realize, *“Baldrige has no substance”* (CC – 5, p. 10), and insisted that *“We are going to be sitting out of Baldrige and IRP”* (CC – 5, p. 12).

College administration has seen the college begin to view accreditation as a quality measure. The President recognized, *“Accreditation generates conversations regarding quality”* (CC – 5, p. 12). One administrator referenced, *“Accreditation is a continuous quality improvement process”* (CC – 5, p. 11). Administrators supported that, *“We need to evaluate everything we do”* (CC – 5, p. 11), and *“Accreditation should be a very participatory process”* (CC – 5, p. 12). They assured the researcher that the AQIP process enables the College to create *“A culture of continuous improvement, with decision making driven by data”* (CC – 5, p. 11).

The administrators agreed, *“The purpose of the journey is improving processes – outcome accreditation. We need to marry accreditation with process improvement”* (CC – 5, p. 11). They supported the statement, *“Accreditation is mission driven and student focused”* (CC – 5, p. 11).

CC – 5 began their AQIP journey in 2000. They have completed one AQIP cycle and will have their site visit in 2006. They recognized that, *“AQIP is tied to teaching and learning”* (CC – 5, p. 10). The President supported, *“The strategic plan is aligned with accreditation. There are eight district wide goals. All colleges and continuing education were asked to complete a goal. There are outcome measures for each goal. All have a sponsor”* (CC – 5, p. 10). The Director of Institutional Research indicated that *“Some AQIP projects fit into the strategic plan”* (CC – 5, p. 10).

They identified the “*First set of Action Projects completed were developmental ed, transition to work and other colleges, alternative delivery,*” and supported “*The Systems Portfolio is comprehensive. A team of AQIP examiners will point out the strengths and weaknesses*” (CC – 5, p. 10). The Director of Institutional Research recognized “*Nine AQIP Criteria fit into five new criteria*” (CC – 5, p. 10). They all agreed that “*AQIP is a work in process*” (CC – 5, p. 11). In relation to the traditional accreditation process, they supported, “*AQIP has taken high stakes out of the visit*” (CC – 5, p. 12). AQIP consists of a series of systems and processes (see Table 3). Upon acceptance into the program, affirmation occurs after seven years.

Table 3. CC – 5 AQIP accreditation cycle

Process	Timeline
Admission to AQIP	September 2000
1st Strategy Forum	November 2000
Accreditation Extension Letter 2007/2008	November 2000
Action Project Submitted	August 2001
AQIP Systems Portfolio Completion	February 2004
AQIP Systems Portfolio Feedback Report	August 2004
2nd Strategy Forum	May 2005
Action Project Submitted	August 2005
AQIP Quality Checkup – on site	2007
Year of Next System Appraisal	2008
HLC Annual Institutional Data Update	Annually in June 2000 – 2005 May 2006
Action Project Annual Updates	Annual Reviews September 2001 – 2006
Annual Update Feedback Report	January 2002, February, 2003, November, 2003, November 2004, November 2005

Note: The Strategy Forum, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Portfolios, and Systems Appraisal are all integral AQIP processes. So, too, is reaffirmation of accreditation, which enables a college or university participating in AQIP to demonstrate its continued fulfillment of the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation (Higher Learning Commission, 2005).

One administrator recalled, *“The state is value added: we were the first state to have a state accreditation process”* (CC – 5, p. 12). The administrators recognized, *“The state needs to keep us accountable in a way that is healthy”* (CC – 5, p. 12). With the number of Iowa community colleges engaging in the AQIP process of accreditation, they supported a *“...need to educate the State Board to move toward AQIP”* (CC – 5, p. 12). They agree that, *“Any integration between the state and NCA would be fantastic. Embed HLC criteria into state code”* (CC – 5, p. 12).

CC – 5 suggested the state consider the following in the review process: *“Develop a rubric for the state to comply with”* (CC – 5, p. 12); *“Accreditation must have the QFP”* (CC – 5, p. 12); and *“Choose info out of the State of the Community College Annual Report for benchmarks”* (CC – 5, p. 12).

### **Analysis of Themes**

Creswell (2005) suggested, *“...themes is another way to analyze qualitative data”* (p. 243). Creswell noted interpretation should contain references to the literature and past studies. *“...the qualitative inquirer interprets the data in view of the past research, showing how the findings may support and/or contradict prior studies”* (p. 251). Mills (1959) recognized, *“A theme is some concept or theory that emerges from your data: “some signal trend, some master conception, or key distinction”* (p. 216).

The themes identified as a result of this case study were supported contextually through the literature, documentation and the responses gathered through interviews with the maximal variation sample. Some classifications were a matter of judgments as some

responses were somewhat ambiguous. The researcher chose to classify the themes as major themes and minor themes as suggested by (Creswell, 2005).

### **Major themes**

Major themes identify the major ideas or concepts that evolved as a result of the coding process. The researcher identified four major themes that support the research:

#### **Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education**

The literature supports assuring a minimum threshold of quality in higher education is the underlying purpose of accreditation. In an outline of the history of accreditation, Eaton (2003) proposed "...in the course of this expansion, the federal government needed reliable information about the academic quality of institutions and programs and turned to accreditation for this purpose.

(p. 3). She also recognized, "...accreditation has been central to an ongoing commitment to excellence that characterizes the U.S. higher education enterprise" (p.1).

Accreditation is referenced by the NCA-HLC (2003) in their mission as, "Serving the common good by assuring and advancing quality in higher education" (p. 1.1-2). Callaway, Ballinger, Donley, and Wright (2003) contended, "Preparing the campus for a long-term commitment to quality tied to accreditation is a challenging but rewarding journey" (p. 39).

Student learning and effective teaching is the core of higher education. Ammentorp and Trites (2002) recognized:

Learning is at the center of all quality initiatives from their earliest conception by Shewart through refinement by Deming and Juran to present day emphasis on standards. In the work of the Higher Learning Commission, the focus of

quality initiative is on student learning and on the organizational arrangements that guarantee and improve it. (p. 55)

In an area where change in higher education is constant and change should be supported by quality initiatives, Hammonds and Humpherys (2004) recognized commonalities among accreditation criteria, learning college principles, and quality values and concepts in higher education. They recognized that the three are "...critical for those institutions desiring to alter, clarify, and promote organizational change and enhance student learning in their institutions through effective planning processes. (p. 55).

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *"Increase communication on quality – if they get it at all, they will understand how important it is"* (ED, p. 15).
- *"The purpose of accreditation is process improvement"* (CC – 1, p. 1).
- *"Accreditation supports improvement of instruction"* (CC – 1, p. 1).
- *"Quality improvement is the goal"* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *"Our institution has a history of implementing continuous quality improvement (CQI) methodology"* (CC – 2, p. 3).
- *"Future choice of accreditation model is toward quality improvement"* (CC – 2, p. 3).
- *"The quality agenda has its ups and downs"* (CC – 3, p. 5).
- *"It is important for quality efforts to supply college with a different set of lenses"* (CC – 3, p. 5).
- *"A quality agenda encompasses all"* (CC – 3, p. 5).
- *"Our quality agenda is now a quality journey. People come together to participate in dialog. Renewed/reinvigorated sense of quality initiatives"* (CC – 3, p. 6).
- *"We are a Baldrige School – Institution with a Total Quality Management (TQM) effort"* (CC – 4, p. 7).
- *"People want to see results on how we improve educational processes"* (CC – 4, p. 8).
- *"Accreditation was promised as an extension of TQM"* (CC – 4, p. 8).

- *“Accreditation and accountability are what I am committed to”* (CC – 4, p.8).
- *“We wanted quality to become part of our culture. There is a commitment to continuous quality improvement”* (CC – 4, p. 8).
- *“Accreditation is a continuous quality improvement process”* (CC – 5, p. 11).
- *“The purpose of the journey is improving processes – outcome is accreditation. We need to marry accreditation with process improvement”* (CC – 5, p. 11).
- *“Accreditation is mission driven and student focused”* (CC – 5, p. 11).
- *“In 1992 we started CQI creating a quality culture, training and leadership”*.
- *“A culture of continuous improvement, with decision making driven by data”* (CC – 5, p. 11).
- *“People in the community sit up and take respect when you look at quality”* (CC – 5, p. 12).
- *“Accreditation generates conversations regarding quality”* (CC – 5, p. 12).

### **AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC accreditation process among Iowa community colleges**

The researcher obtained data from the DE that supported a significant trend in the number of Iowa’s community colleges that had adopted or were in the process of adopting the AQIP process of accreditation. Nine of the colleges were committed to AQIP, while two colleges were transitioning to AQIP. The data also indicated that four community colleges chose to go through and/or remain with the more traditional accreditation process, PEAQ.

A focus on quality and continuous improvement in higher education means moving away from traditional models of leadership and organization to a more collaborative approach that creates a learning community dedicated to serving students and staff more effectively and building better relationships becomes transformational for the institution (Sallis, 1994). The NCA-HLC explained that “AQIP’s goal is to infuse the principles and



benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities in order to assure and advance the quality of higher education: (p. 6.1-1).

Callaway et al. (2003) assessed that, “The AQIP criteria and principles delineate the expectations for performance excellence...self-assessment is critical to fostering a learning environment as well as a willingness to take risks and make mistakes on the journey” (p. 39). Carter and Martin (2006) recognized that not everyone at an institution will support the process initially, however, they have gotten “the ball rolling”: “...a number of us have viewed the AQIP activities as exhilarating and affirming. The AQIP process has been a journey teeming with opportunities to change and grow” (p. 4:54).

The AQIP process can be labor intensive. Jensen and Erwin (2001) supported, “When setting the stage for quality improvement or continuous process improvement, it is vital that the top leadership view this as a commitment that is continuous. It is not a flavor of the month educational fad” (p. 141). Brewer, Neefe, Rada, and Rasch (2001) realized that the “...process is enabling the college to use its resources and its energy to focus on improvement instead of focusing on preparing for an NCA site visit” (p. 146).

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *“My college is preparing for a PEAQ site visit in April of 2006. There is an internal discussion to move to AQIP following our PEAQ review” (P – 1, p. 13).*
- *“Realize that within a period of time after PEAQ accreditation, you do not have to go through the essential steps for AQIP” (CC – 1, p. 2).*
- *“More people are transitioning to AQIP” (CC – 1, p. 2).*
- *“Down the path we are looking at AQIP” (CC – 2, p. 3).*
- *“We have talked about many AQIP processes” (CC – 2, p. 3).*
- *“College president felt that at the end of their PEAQ visit the college needed to start exploring the option on transitioning to AQIP” (CC – 3, p.5).*

- *“Our Action Projects are: communications, curriculum, and advising architecture (on-line and face to face)” (CC – 3, p. 5).*
- *“The college has done a better job of planning as a result of the Conversation Day” (CC – 3, p. 5).*
- *“A concern with AQIP is that there is not a lot of underlying architecture. In Chicago we seem to swim around AQIP. Start with three Action Projects that fold into a System’s Portfolio” (CC – 3, p. 5).*
- *“PEAQ appears to be more reflective, whereas AQIP is more forward thinking” (CC – 3, p. 5).*
- *“AQIP encourages organizations to move forward, will help to keep accreditation on the radar screen” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“The entire college community was involved in Conversation Day. An on-line survey was conducted prior to Conversation Day” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“We are involved with Action Project and the Systems Portfolio – AQIP evaluators are supposed to come every four years” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“Best part of AQIP is that every year we address issues” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“With AQIP there is an institutional requirement that you are always engaged in improvement” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“We have mechanisms to get same data every year” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“AQIP will keep evolving” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“The System’s Portfolio is so comprehensive it needs to cross over five criteria” (CC – 4, p.7).*
- *“Our Action Plans are; decision making – upper levels, data collection improvements, student reporting, student satisfaction, assessment and diversity” (CC – 4, p. 8).*
- *“The System’s Portfolio makes us a better school” (CC – 4, p. 8).*
- *“Can drop Action Plans at any time – succeeded by events” (CC – 4, p. 8).*
- *“Quality management tools drove institution to AQIP” (CC – 4, p. 8).*
- *“AQIP causes us to be more efficient” (CC – 4, p. 8).*
- *“We pull from our portfolio to support our strategic plan” (CC – 4, p.8).*
- *“We have completed one full AQIP cycle which includes two strategy forums one in 2000 where  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the projects were evaluated and one in 2005 where multiple projects were evaluated” (CC – 5, p. 10).*

- *“First set of Action Projects completed were developmental ed, transition to work and other colleges, alternative delivery”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“We are waiting for our AQIP site visit in 2006 which will be a 2 – 3 person team”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“The strategic plan is aligned with AQIP accreditation. There are eight district wide goals. All colleges and continuing education were asked to complete a goal. There are outcome measures for each goal. All have a sponsor”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“Some AQIP projects fit into the strategic plan”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“The System’s Portfolio is comprehensive. It is read by a team of examiners who point out the strengths and weaknesses”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“AQIP is tied to teaching and learning”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“AQIP fits into five criteria”* (CC – 5, p. 10).
- *“AQIP is a work in process”* (CC – 5, p. 11).
- *“AQIP has taken high stakes out of the visit”* (CC – 5, p. 12).

**DE accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC processes and include both PEAQ and AQIP**

The state of Iowa has recognized that collaborative partnerships are valuable when assessing quality in higher education. The NCA-HLC supports this idea:

States license and give degree-granting authority; the federal government distributes student aid and other grant monies to eligible colleges and universities; and both often rely on testimony of acceptable educational quality provided by the accrediting associations. With its most recent revision of accreditation criteria, the Commission gives evidence of its responsibility not only to its members but to governmental entities and other important constituencies. (p. 1.1-5)

Quality in higher education is a topic at the forefront in both the private and public sectors. Spellings encouraged the Commission on the Future of Higher Education *“...to be as ‘specific as you can’ about what state, local, and federal policy makers can do to ensure the continued preeminence of American higher education”* (as cited in Field, 2006b, p. 1).

Colleges and universities face unprecedented challenges created by calls for accountability through the state and federal governments, as well as regional and national accreditors. Two of these challenges are the need to provide access for a changing student population, and the need to assure higher education remains affordable. Public colleges are challenged by state budget shortages. In numerous states, the allocation of dollars to higher education is not increasing and in some instances has decreased. Wagner and Stumpf (2005) recognized, "...colleges and universities are expected to do more with less. In response, administrators look for management techniques to improve efficiency and demonstrate accountability" (p. 99).

The state of Iowa recognizes the NCA-HLC as a viable organization to collaborate with to ensure its citizens a minimum threshold of quality in the state's community colleges. Volume III of the *Iowa Code 2005* in Section 260C.47(1) states, "*The state accreditation process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of the north central association of colleges and schools, including the evaluation cycle, self-study process, and the criteria for evaluation...*" and continues to state in Section 260C.47(1) that, "*Rules adopted by the state board shall include provisions for the coordination of the accreditation process under this section with activities of accreditation associations, which are designed to avoid duplication in the accreditation process*" (p. 2,596).

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- "*The DE and the colleges are concerned with quality*" (ED, p. 15).
- "*It is important to dovetail the state accreditation process with NCA*" (ED, p.1 5).
- "*You're going to be evaluated against the five HLC criteria*" (P – 2, p. 17).
- "*Use the same terminology for HLC and Iowa*" (P – 2, p. 18).

- “Accreditation is a good step – it challenges us to look where we were, where we are, and where we are going” (CC – 1, p. 2).
- “The state accreditation process needs to align with NCA” (CC – 2, p. 3).
- “Make HLC and state criteria the same. If there must be a process for the state of Iowa, it should be that same for the state as it is for the HLC. That will provide the community colleges with what they need to conduct their quality journeys, based on their own architecture of quality” (CC – 3, p. 6).
- “Take the same accreditation report. Copy it. Put “NCA-HLC Administrative Consultant” cover page on one and a “DE Administrative Consultant” cover page on the other” (CC – 3, p. 6).
- “Write a crossover to the state criteria” (CC – 4, p. 7).
- “Any integration between the state and NCA would be fantastic” (CC – 5, p. 11).
- “...need to educate the State Board to move toward AQIP” (CC – 5, p. 12).
- “Choose info out of the State of the Community College Annual Report for benchmarks” (CC – 5, p. 12).

### **State accreditation process adds value to Iowa’s community colleges**

In conversations with administrators from the NCA-HLC at the 2006 Annual Meeting in Chicago, the researcher found that they were most interested in the Iowa review process. The NCA-HLC administrators indicated that Iowa was one of the few states that had a formalized state process in addition to a regional accreditation process. However, they were unable to provide the researcher with any information regarding other states that have an accreditation process. A community college professional that has a long history with accreditation supported, “The state is value added: we were the first state to have a state accreditation process” (CC – 5, p. 12).

The *Guide for State Accreditation of Community Colleges* (March 2003) states, “This legislation outlined requirements for new standards and new accreditation process for community colleges that address issues of quality, access, accountability, and institutional

improvement...the new standards should provide directions or goals toward which colleges could strive, including those qualities” (p. 5).

Laanan (2001) stated, “Although accountability requirements may differ from state to state, they share the same goal—improving educational and institutional effectiveness” (p. 70). Silag and Snyder (2006) suggested, “From the outset, accountability has been one of the fundamental purposes of community college accreditation in Iowa ... In addition to accountability, the designers of Iowa’s community college accreditation process intended that the implementation of the process would encourage the colleges to increase their effectiveness” (p. 4:10). The Code of Iowa 2005 (Vol. III, Section 260C.27) states, “The process shall be jointly developed and agreed upon by the department of education and the community colleges” (p. 2,596).

The following responses from two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *“My preference is for the state to come prior to NCA”* (P – 1, p. 13).
- *“The state accreditation process gives the DE and the colleges’ perspective”* (ED, p. 15).
- *“Colleges receive value in going through the process”* (ED, p. 15).
- *“I do hear comments regarding the necessity of the state accreditation process”* (ED, p. 15).
- *“The state accreditation process is an important process”* (ED, p. 15).
- *“The difference between DE and NCA accreditation processes is that the DE recognizes non-credit and NCA does not. Non-credit side is good for the state”* (CC – 1, p.1).
- *“The state visit assisted us before the official NCA visit”* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *“The state visit assists in areas where we need help”* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *“DE could assist colleges as they know what the accreditation hot buttons are”* (CC – 1, p. 2).

- *“The DE carries the news on information or direction on how the accreditation process is moving” (CC – 1, p. 2).*
- *“Provide a set of definitions with the revised criteria” (CC – 1, p. 2).*
- *“Report accreditation issues to presidents, CAO’s, chief student service officers, deans” (CC – 1, p. 2).*
- *“Colleagues in Iowa coming on campus is more beneficial because they know more about the colleges” (CC – 2, p. 3).*
- *“Accreditation extremely valuable and very useful” (CC – 2, p. 4).*
- *“Accreditation provides a broader way of thinking about yourself” (CC – 2, p. 4).*
- *“There are additional standards from the state” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“Develop some sort of structure that works for us” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“There is a difference between changing state code and changing rules” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“It is a practice session for the NCA visit” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“I ultimately see the state accessing the college website on an annual basis for System Portfolio and Action Project results” (CC – 3, p. 6).*
- *“Worst thing the state could do is list their own set of criteria” (CC – 4, p. 7).*
- *“State process was good frontrunner to NCA” (CC – 4, p. 9).*
- *“...tenth criteria should be state issues/state strategic plan” (CC – 4, p. 9).*
- *“State accreditation validates what state wants you to do” (CC – 4, p. 9).*
- *“The state needs to keep us accountable in a way that is healthy” (CC – 5, p. 12).*

### **Minor themes**

Minor themes represent secondary ideas in a database. Three minor themes were identified as a result of the coding process:

#### **State standards referenced in the *Code of Iowa* need to be included in the state accreditation process**

Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that has an accreditation process for its community colleges over and above the regional accreditation from the NCA-HLC. The

*Iowa Code 2005* (Vol. III, Section 260C.47(1) states, "...which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260C.48; and shall identify and make provisions for the needs of the state that are not met by the associations accreditation process" (p. 2596).

Whereas, section 260C.48(1) states:

1. The state board shall develop standards and rules for the accreditation of community college programs. Except as provided in this subsection and subsection 4, standards developed shall be general in nature so as to apply to more than one specific program of instruction. With regard to community college employed instructors, the standards adopted shall at a minimum require that a full time community college instructor meet the following ... 260C.48(2) Standards developed shall include a provision that the standard academic workload ... 260C.48(3) Standards developed shall include provisions requiring equal access in recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs. (pp. 2,597-2,598)

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *"There are additional standards from the state"* (CC – 3, p. 6).
- *"State accreditation should compliment the quality faculty plan and minimum standards"* (CC – 4, p. 9).
- *"Legislators said we need the state accreditation process"* (ED, p. 15).
- *"The DE cannot be prescriptive – they can guard state code"* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *"We would be comfortable for the state to adopt the NCA criteria along with those areas required by the code"* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *"Accreditation wants you to know that you are addressing compliance issues"* (P – 2, p. 17).
- *"Supplemental information needs to be added because it is not under NCA"* (CC – 2, p. 3).
- *"The state needs to work with prescriptive aspect"* (CC – 3, p. 6).



### **Assessment of student learning is an integral part of the accreditation process**

Assessment of student learning continues to gain recognition in higher education.

Neill and Williams (2003) recognized, “Moving from plans for assessing student achievement to action and results presents many challenges for colleges committed to a process improvement philosophy” (p. 95). In the current conversations between the Commission on the Future of Higher Education and the private accreditors assessment of student learning is also part of the conversation. (Field 2006b) reported an idea being discussed by members of the Commission, “...using accreditation as a lever to require colleges to measure student learning” (p. 4).

Peter Ewell, vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, started the discussion with the Commission by suggesting that “*while colleges have historically been ‘allergic’ to the idea of assessment, they are reaching a tipping point where the institutional leadership is stepping up*” (as cited in Field, 2006a, p. 2). In another reference to assessment of student learning, Bollag (2006) stated, “...accreditors have shifted emphasis from measuring inputs – like the number of faculty with terminal degrees – to measuring outputs, by requiring institutions to develop ways to assess what students learn” (p. 3). Field (2006c) referenced the notion of assessment by Charles Miller, the chairman for the federal Commission on the Future of Higher Education, “...to test college students as a way of measuring what they have learned. Although he has emphasized that he will not propose mandatory testing of college students...urging colleges to adopt assessment of their own accord” (p. 17).

Edwards, Holtman, Raftery, and Sparks (2003) proposed an answer to the question on how outcomes assessment become integrated into the culture of an institution, “The answer,

it seems, is mostly by trial and error – and very slowly...over time techniques and ideas evolve, change, and are sometimes discarded, but some strategies are successful in fostering an assessment climate at the institution” (p. 44).

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *“Assessment gives concrete evidence of support”* (P – 1, p. 13).
- *“Institution should develop assessment process – DE should not be concerned with process but how the college is responding to data gleaned from the process”* (P – 1, p.13).
- *“Assessment has value when you forced to look at it”* (P – 1), p. 13).
- *“We need to be more integrative – five year program review, assessment, accreditation”* (CC – 1, p.2).
- *“Accreditation, assessment, and program review processes should be flowing”* (CC – 1, p.2).

### **State accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practice and benchmarks with peer institutions**

Dickeson (2006) contended, “...currently colleges and universities are accredited for self-improvement...conducting a self-study and having it validated by an external group of peers, institutions can take a look at themselves and determine institutional progress over time” (p. 2). From a regional accreditor’s perspective, The NCA-HLC (2003) supported peer review: “...they continue to rely on institutional self-evaluation, peer review and institutional response as essential to sound accreditation practice” (p. 1.1-1). The Commission further recognized:

Peer review in higher education is based on the fundamental assumption that quality in higher education is best served through a process that enables peers

of the organization, informed by standards best understood and applied by professional in higher education, to make the comparative judgments essential to quality assurance. (1.3-1)

The following responses from the two presidents, the IACCT administrator, and the maximal variation sample support this theme:

- *“The DE Annual Administrator’s Conference could include best practices”* (CC – 1, p. 2).
- *“Colleagues in Iowa coming on campus is more beneficial because they know more about the colleges”* (CC – 2, p. 3).
- *“Peer review is most valuable for a college”* (CC – 2, p. 3).
- *“The state visit is a good practice session for NCA visit”* (CC – 3, p. 6).
- *“Accreditation allows us to pull best practices from across the state”* (CC – 5, p. 12).
- *“My preference is for the state to come prior to NCA”* (P – 1, p. 13).
- *“The state visit assisted us before the official NCA visit”* (CC – 1, p. 2).

### Summary

This chapter served as a summary of the findings of the researcher for this qualitative case study. The DE and the researcher were involved with the study for one year to collect data and documentation that would assist in revising the state accreditation process that Iowa community college administrators could potentially support. The findings reported in this chapter consisted of a sample of the narrative that was a result of the interviews from the maximal variation sample, and documentation pertinent to the subject matter as well as the literature. Merriam (2002) recognized, “Since findings are in the form of words rather than numbers, reports vary widely with regard to ratio of supporting ‘raw’ data...it is the rich, thick descriptions, the words (not numbers) that persuade the reader of the trustworthiness of the findings” (p. 15).

Finally, the researcher identified four major themes: (a) Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education; (b) AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC accreditation process among Iowa community colleges; (c) the DE accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC processes to include both PEAQ and AQIP; and (d) the state accreditation process adds value to the Iowa's community colleges. Three minor themes identified were: (a) assessment of student learning is an integral part of the accreditation process; (b) state standards referenced in the *Code of Iowa* need to be included in the state accreditation process; and (c) the state accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practice and benchmarks with peer institutions.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

In this chapter, an overview of the study is provided in which the researcher summarizes the theoretical perspectives, draws conclusion, and presents implications and recommendations regarding the state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. A personal reflection from the researcher is also included. Ewell (2004) contended, "For better or worse, the majority of accrediting agencies – both institutional and specialized – are right in the middle of rethinking their approaches, and the degree to which this is happening is unprecedented" (p. 1).

### Overview of the Study

Wergin (2005) suggested, "...accreditation, largely an American invention, is the only organized means by which the academy provides quality assurance to the larger public" (p. 35). Dickeson (2006) stated "...the purpose of accreditation as serving both the institution and the public" (pp. 2-3), while Eaton (2003) defined accreditation as "...a private form of self-regulation that serves not only higher education itself, but also students, government and the public..."(p. 1). This qualitative case study was designed to assist the DE in collecting and analyzing data that would support revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules and the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*.

In February of 2005, the DE appointed an Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force to review the current state accreditation process and make suggestions for revisions that all stakeholders would support. At the same time, a DE Administrative Consultant was assigned to coordinate the process. In May of 2005, the researcher, as a

participant observer for the project, was approved by the DE Chief Administrator and the Task Force.

This review was prompted by the significant changes in criteria and processes that were announced by the NCA-HLC in January of 2005 (Silag & Snyder, 2006). These changes support the growing conversations at the national level on quality in American higher education and accountability of colleges and universities. Wergin (2005) stated, "...accrediting commissions face the difficult task of both assuring quality and improving quality" (p. 35). In May of 2005, the case study was approved by the gatekeepers who were comprised of the DE Chief Administrator and the Taskforce.

The research employed a theoretical orientation utilizing an interpretive qualitative approach through a case study. Creswell (1998) stated, "a case study is an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). The bounded system in this case study is the state accreditation process. It is bound by time in the sense that the accreditation process has a rich history with Iowa's community colleges. This case study was bound by place as it *might* solely impact the accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. A qualitative case study provides an in depth study of this system, based on a diverse array of data collection materials, and the researcher situates this system or case within its larger "context" or setting (Creswell, 1998).

The interview questions and purposeful sample were identified in the summer of 2005. Interviews and focus groups were held during the fall of 2005 and winter of 2006. In December 2005 a two-day retreat was held at the Des Moines Area Community College West Campus. The purpose of the retreat was twofold. First, it served as a member check to

support validity of the data collection process, enabling members from the maximal variation sample to review and respond to data that was collected during the interviews. Second, the retreat enabled the researcher, the DE Bureau Chief, and the DE Administrative Consultant the opportunity to begin writing the first draft of the rules and the guide that support the state accreditation process.

At the same time, data analysis was being conducted by the researcher. As a result of an extensive coding process by the researcher, four major themes were identified:

1. Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education.
2. AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC accreditation process among Iowa community colleges.
3. The DE accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC processes and include both PEAQ and AQIP.
4. The state accreditation process adds value to Iowa's community colleges.

The data analysis also identified three minor themes: (a) state standards referenced in the *Code of Iowa* need to be included in the state accreditation process; (b) assessment of student learning is an integral part of the accreditation process; and (c) the state accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practice and benchmark with other community colleges.

In January of 2006, the draft of the rules and the guide were submitted to the Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force for discussion at a face-to-face meeting at the IACCT office in Des Moines. Recommendations were made for changes that include: aligning examples of evidence with the examples of evidence from the NCA-HLC; language

regarding graduate level coursework was eliminated; setting apart standards mandated by law from the NCA-HLC criteria; and rearranging appendices for clarity. After thorough discussion, it was recommended to remove the sections in the guide that reference planning and conducting state accreditation. These sections would be revised at a later date.

In February and March of 2006, a copy of the revised draft was sent to the presidents, chief academic officers, chief student service officers, IACCT and the Community College Council for reaction. All stakeholders supported the revisions. On May 11, 2006, the revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules (Appendix G) were then reviewed by the DE Bureau Chief and the DE Administrative Consultant with the Iowa State Board of Education. No written comments were received on the proposed revisions. The revisions were approved by the Iowa Administrative Rules Committee on July 11, 2006. The Iowa State Board of Education officially voted in favor of the amended rules at their meeting on July 27, 2006.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Theoretical perspectives for this study started with a broad orientation of qualitative research. The researcher utilized a theoretical orientation recognizing an interpretive qualitative approach through case study. The literature supports the validity of qualitative research, and its gain in recognition and respect among scholars. It is viewed by some to have been derived as quantitative practice conducted in the 1960s (Creswell, 2005). Scholars support the continued development of the method.

Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data with the researcher being concerned with process as well as the outcome (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992).

Qualitative research is descriptive and the data are analyzed inductively. An inductive



approach enables the researcher to structure the study as it proceeds and to freely explore any significance with the phenomena.

An interpretive theoretical perspective can support several research designs, the most common being grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, or case study. The interpretive qualitative research allows for understanding. In this context the interpretive method allows the researcher the time to study and understand the meanings of social actions for the individuals involved in them (Merriam, 2002).

A case study is also referred to a “bounded system”—bound in both place and time. The bounded system in this case study is the state accreditation process. It is bound by time in the sense that the accreditation process has a rich history with Iowa’s community colleges. It was bound by place as it might solely impact the accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges.

Theoretical perspectives surrounding interpretive qualitative research through case study supported the research design for the review of the state accreditation process for Iowa’s community colleges. This inductive approach to the case study resulted in the revisions to the rules and the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* that the stakeholders support.

### **Limitations**

Creswell (2005) stated, “...the qualitative researcher suggests possible limitations or weaknesses of the study and makes recommendations for future research. These limitations may address problems in data collection, unanswered questions by participants, or better selection of purposeful sample or sites for selection for the study (p. 252). Limitations are

seen as weaknesses of a study that could impact the results. The framework developed for this study identified limitations which may have affected research outcomes. The limitations identified in this study may assist future researchers on the topic of accreditation.

1. This case study was limited to community colleges located in the state of Iowa.
2. Community college focus groups that were interviewed were limited to a sample of five of the 15 community colleges in Iowa.
3. Each of the five community colleges in the maximal variation sample focus groups included the college president. However, additional members of the focus group on each campus differed in both number and level of expertise regarding accreditation.
4. Not all professional focus group interviews that were identified at the onset of the study were conducted due to conflicts around the identified timeline established by the DE.
5. Researcher was limited in her ability to assess state accreditation processes outside of Iowa.
6. Personal biases, relationships, and experiences of the researcher as a participant observer may influence the results of this study.
7. The process was limited to changes solely in Iowa Administrative Rules and the *Guide for State Accreditation of Community Colleges*. There was no impact on the *Code of Iowa*.
8. The research was completed prior to the release of the findings and final recommendations from the Council for the Future of Higher Education in September, 2006.

## Conclusions

The research design for this case study was comprised of the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the results of the research. The researcher utilized the approach as outlined by Creswell (2005) in conducting this case study research:

1. Identify the intent, the appropriate design, and how intent relates to the research problem.
2. Discuss approval and access considerations. Receive approval from institutional review board.
3. Use appropriate data collection procedures.
4. Analyze and interpret data within a design.
5. Write a report consistent with the design.

Creswell's (2005) framework was employed to carry out the case study research on the review of the state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. Krathwohl (1998), Merriam (2002), and Creswell (2005) suggested that the sources most widely used in data gathering are observation and interviewing. They collectively support the analysis of records and documents as part of the data collection process. Based on the findings, four major themes and three minor themes were identified that directly or indirectly support the revisions to the rules and the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*. Based on the findings and themes acquired from the sample and various stakeholder groups, the following conclusions were reached:

1. The revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules and *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* will facilitate evaluation of institutional effectiveness of

Iowa's community colleges utilizing continuous quality improvement standards and benchmarks to ensure quality in Iowa's community colleges.

2. The revised Iowa Administrative Rules and *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* will be inclusive of all community colleges regarding process and address both the PEAQ and AQIP accreditation processes.
3. The revised Iowa Administrative Rules and *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* will address the five new criteria of the NCA-HLC, their core components, and examples of evidence.
4. The revised Iowa Administrative Rules and *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* will address the four standards identified in *Iowa Code* to include: minimum faculty standards, faculty load, special needs, and vocational program review and evaluation.
5. As the *Guide for State Accreditation of Community Colleges* is finalized, the site visit process will be defined for colleges participating in both the PEAQ and AQIP accreditation processes.

### **Implications for Practice**

Implications in this context are an opportunity for the researcher to remark on the importance of the study (Creswell, 2005). The purpose of this research was to document and analyze the data used to revise the state accreditation process for the community colleges of Iowa. The results were a revised set of the Iowa Administrative Rules that support *Iowa Code* and the revised *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*. The stakeholders supported the results. The major themes identified in the findings supported these revisions:

1. Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education.
2. AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC accreditation process among Iowa community colleges.
3. The DE accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC processes and include both PEAQ and AQIP.
4. The state accreditation process adds value to Iowa's community colleges.

***Accreditation is a process that assures a minimum threshold of quality in higher education.*** With the current reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, conversations on accountability in higher education are at the forefront. Divergent opinions from both the public and the private sectors on the value of accreditation and the process are referenced in the literature. However, both the public and the private sectors are committed to an accreditation process that will promote quality in higher education.

Each conversation and/or interview that the researcher had over the course of the year with Iowa community college stakeholders supported this commitment to quality and process improvement in educational practice. The report that will be issued in September of 2006 from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education could impact current accreditation practice.

***AQIP is becoming the preferred NCA-HLC accreditation process among Iowa community colleges.*** O'Banion stated, "...their unique design as American institutions, community colleges have often been bellwether institutions for change, leading the way into new and unexplored territory (p. ix). Community colleges have been identified by the NCA-HLC as the institutions that are embracing the AQIP process more readily than four-year

private and public colleges and universities. This case study supported the proposition that Iowa's community colleges are willing to engage in initiatives that support continuous quality improvement processes. Those community colleges that have made the successful transition to AQIP, thus far, have demonstrated long history of practice that support continuous quality improvement (CQI)/total quality management (TQM) initiatives.

***The DE accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges should align more closely with the NCA-HLC process and include both PEAQ and AQIP.*** As Iowa's community colleges continue to mature, it is important that they are viewed separate from the K-12 institutions with regard to accreditation. There are continuing conversations among educators in Iowa as to the "camp" in which community colleges most naturally align—K-12 or higher education. By adopting the NCA-HLC new criteria (i.e., core components and examples of evidence, nearly verbatim, into the Iowa Administrative Rules) Iowa's community colleges more closely align themselves with other sectors in higher education.

***The state accreditation process adds value to Iowa's community colleges.*** Iowa has 15 distinct community colleges that measure their effectiveness through their independent missions. Ewell (1992) stated, "...the heart of any definition of institutional effectiveness remains the ability of an institution to match its performance to its established purposes as stated in its mission" (p. 6). Many of the stakeholders value the peer review that has been a long-standing tradition of the state accreditation process. With both PEAQ and AQIP, there is potential for the continuation of a solid peer review component of the accreditation process. In addition, the accreditation process could be enhanced utilizing technology.

The minor themes identified also supported the revision to the rules. Minor themes in the findings were: state standards referenced in the Code of Iowa need to be included in the

state accreditation process; assessment of student learning in an integral part of the accreditation process; and the state accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practices and benchmarks with peer institutions.

***State standards referenced in the Code of Iowa need to be included in the state accreditation process.*** *Iowa Code* references four standards that community colleges must meet in order to be accredited; minimum faculty standards, faculty load, special needs and vocational program review and evaluation. The revised Iowa Administrative Rules include these standards as an important component in addition to the NCA-HLC criteria. The stakeholders were sensitive to including the standards as they appeared in *Iowa Code*. The state standards were purposefully set apart from the NCA-HLC criteria in both the revised rules and the current revisions to the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*. In an accreditation visit, the state review team will have the responsibility of carefully reviewing the evidence that supports the standards, whereas, the “rubber stamp” on the five criteria will predominantly be sanctioned by the NCA-HLC.

***Assessment of student learning is an integral part of the accreditation process.*** Since 1989, the NCA-HLC has considered assessment of student learning as an essential component of an organization’s effort to evaluate overall effectiveness. In their current revision, they have identified assessment of student learning as one of the Commissions Statements. Ewell (2004) suggested, “...the drive towards assessment as an emphasis in accreditation in recent years is as much about building institutional capacity for self-examination as it is about assuring the quality of learning outcomes in themselves” (p. 5). It will be important in the future to have faculty members, with the input of students and administration, develop and sustain the assessment program.

*State accreditation process enables community colleges to share best practice and benchmarks with peer institutions.* Peer review has been an integral part of accreditation history from the academy's perspective. Educators appreciate and value their colleagues' perspective on accreditation and best practice. With the conversion to AQIP and the focus more toward continuous quality improvement measures, in the future, peer review may have to be addressed differently. There could be opportunities to network with NCA-HLC to develop a program that would employ state community college practitioners to address the peer review component of AQIP.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Barkham and Bingham (1995) stated, "If a program is not evaluated, one can always claim success (p. 36). In response to the significant changes in the NCA-HLC criteria and processes for accrediting colleges and universities that were effective on January 1, 2005, the DE began a comprehensive revision of the state accreditation process. This study presented revisions to the Iowa Administrative Rules in the *Iowa Code* that outline the state's process for accreditation of its community colleges. The study also provides potential for future research related to both Iowa and the NCA-HLC accreditation processes. Specific recommendations include the following:

1. Develop a plan with stakeholders for conducting state accreditation site visits that will favor both NCA-HLC processes to include: formation of accreditation teams; conducting site visits; and important distinctions in evaluating PEAQ and AQIP colleges. This will finalize the revisions to the current *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa's Community Colleges*.



2. Establish, in collaboration with the NCA-HLC, a network of peer accreditation evaluators within the state to assist with accreditation visits under both the PEAQ and AQIP processes. Currently, the state has several professionals that serve as NCA-HLC Consultant Evaluators for the PEAQ process. However, additional expertise is needed with AQIP based on the number of Iowa community colleges that are adopting that process.
3. Expand the annual DE Administrator's Forum that is held in the fall of the year, to include a track specifically for community college professionals to share best practices that align with the five new criteria outlined by the NCA-HLC, while addressing other accreditation issues. This will continue to keep accreditation at the forefront of conversations regarding continuous quality improvement.
4. The state accreditation process and the State Strategic Plan for Iowa's Community Colleges are two distinct processes. Each involves significant reporting from the individual colleges. With more colleges transitioning to AQIP, frequency of reporting accreditation measures will increase. Future research could identify a process that would align the annual reporting processes for state accreditation and the state strategic plan that would enhance efficiencies from both the state and the colleges' perspectives.
5. Identify linkages between the annual data provided by the DE in the annual *Condition of Iowa Community College* report and the AQIP System's Portfolio. Focus on developing strategies that will allow the state to use technology in monitoring documentation that supports accreditation reporting.

6. Expand the conversation regarding equity to align more effectively with the new NCA-HLC criteria and commission statements.
7. Compare Iowa's state accreditation process with states in the NCA-HLC region that have a process independent from regional accreditation.
8. Compare Iowa's state accreditation process with states in other CHEA accrediting regions that have a process independent from regional accreditation.
9. Review the impact of the new Quality Faculty Plan for each of Iowa's 15 community colleges and its relationship to the assessment of student learning. Align the Quality Faculty Plan more effectively with the NCA-HLC criteria and commission statements. The Quality Faculty Plans are addressed in Sec. 260C.48(4) of *Iowa Code*.

Iowa is one of the few states in the nation that have a state accrediting process in addition to the regional accrediting process. The community colleges support a state process that aligns with the NCA-HLC process, includes state standards that are identified in *Iowa Code*, and promotes quality through continuous quality improvement in higher education. The state's attention to process will assure the continued accountability of its community colleges.

### **Personal Reflection**

I selected accreditation for my dissertation research because I consider myself to be an advocate for quality in education. I have had the opportunity to be affiliated with one of Iowa's community colleges for the past 13 years. I have found that my colleagues, within my college and across the state, share this quest for quality in higher education. This research is

intended for each Iowa community college practitioner committed to quality. Creswell (2005) suggested:

Because qualitative researchers believe that your personal views can never be kept separate from interpretations, personal reflections about the meaning of the data are included in the research study. You base these personal interpretations on hunches, insights, and intuition. Because you may have been in the field and visited personally at great lengths with individuals, you are in good position to reflect and remark on the larger meaning of the data. (p. 251)

I began my doctoral dissertation research in 2005, shortly after the college where I am employed completed its NCA-HLC and state accreditation processes. These exhaustive processes resulted in 10 years of future accreditation from both entities. For my college, it was an opportunity to reflect on the past, connect with the present, and look toward the future. As an administrator, this was my first experience with involvement in a formal accreditation process.

Through accreditation, the college reviews its processes in relation to the five criteria outlined by the NCA-HLC. In addition, from the state's perspective, the college must address the standards identified in *Iowa Code*. The decision made by a college to select the PEAQ or AQIP process is made independently by each college. The level of commitment and involvement from staff is also independent of each college.

Developing a hypothesis is more prevalent in quantitative research. However, Krathwohl (1998) suggested that, in all research, defining hypothesis is more like "...a hunch that guides a study" (p. 4). At the onset of the study, I hypothesized that there was a level of anxiety among community college practitioners with regards to accreditation, both at the state and regional levels.

In an effort to test this hypothesis, I developed an exercise that I have used throughout the year as an ice-breaker during several focus groups and at a couple of presentations, at the DE Administrator's Forum on October 14, 2005 and the other at the NCA-HLC Annual Meeting in Chicago on April 4, 2006. I entitled the exercise: “ ‘A’ Words for the Wise.”

I contend that a little anxiety is healthy. In the exercise, I provided two definitions of anxiety: one being a “state of uneasiness,” the other being “intensely desirous or interested.” I then posed the following question: “What are some words that begin with the letter “A” that make you “anxious” as a college leader?”

To date, I have amassed a collection of 97 different words (and a few phrases) from college leaders that begin with the letter “A” that have caused them some anxiety. Of the 97 “A” words, the three that had the most multiple recordings were assessment, accountability, and accreditation. Taylor, Branham, and Spangehl (2006) supported the relationship between anxiety and accreditation: “There appears to be a level of anxiety among colleges regarding accreditation. They wonder, ‘What will the team think of us’? The real question should be, ‘What do we think of ourselves?’ ”

Through my work in the field during past year on the review of the state accreditation process, and based on the findings that were shared in this chapter, I contend that the community colleges of Iowa embrace a culture of continuous quality improvement that supports assessment, accountability, and accreditation. As a participant observer, I noted as a limitation in this research that my personal biases, relationships, and experiences on the research topic may have influenced the results of this study.

## APPENDIX A. CODE OF IOWA

### 260C.47 ACCREDITATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS.

1. The state board of education shall establish an accreditation process for community college programs by July 1, 1997. The process shall be jointly developed and agreed upon by the department of education and the community colleges. The state accreditation process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of the north central association of colleges and schools, including the evaluation cycle, the self-study process, and the criteria for evaluation, which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260C.48; and shall identify and make provision for the needs of the state that are not met by the association's accreditation process. For the academic year commencing July 1, 1998, and in succeeding school years, the department of education shall use a two-component process for the continued accreditation of community college programs. Beginning July 1, 2006, the state accreditation process shall incorporate the standards developed pursuant to section 260C.48, subsection 4.

a. The first component consists of submission of required data by the community colleges and annual monitoring by the department of education of all community colleges for compliance with state program evaluation requirements adopted by the state board.

b. The second component consists of the use of an accreditation team appointed by the director of the department of education, to conduct an evaluation, including an on-site visit of each community college, with a comprehensive evaluation to occur during the same year as the evaluation by the north central association of colleges and schools, and an interim evaluation midway between comprehensive evaluations. The number and composition of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director, but the team shall include members of the department of education staff and community college staff members from community colleges other than the community college that conducts the programs being evaluated for accreditation. Beginning July 1, 2006, the accreditation team shall monitor the quality faculty plan implemented by each community college pursuant to section 260C.36.

c. Rules adopted by the state board shall include provisions for coordination of the accreditation process under this section with activities of accreditation associations, which are designed to avoid duplication in the accreditation process.

2. Prior to a visit to a community college, members of the accreditation team shall have access to the program audit report filed with the department for that community college. After a visit to a community college, the accreditation team shall determine whether the accreditation standards for a program have been met and shall make a report to the director and the state board, together with a recommendation as to whether the program of the community college should remain accredited. The accreditation team shall report strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each program standard and shall advise the community college of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance strengths and improve areas of weakness. A community college may respond to the accreditation team's report.

3. The state board shall determine whether a program of a community college shall remain accredited. If the state board determines that a program of a community college does not meet accreditation standards, the director of the department of education, in cooperation with the board of directors of the community college, shall establish a plan prescribing the procedures that must be taken to correct deficiencies in meeting the program standards, and shall establish a deadline date for correction of the deficiencies. The deadline for correction of deficiencies under a plan shall be no later than June 30 of the year following the on-site visit of the accreditation team. The plan is subject to approval of the state board. Plans shall include components which address meeting program deficiencies, sharing or merger options, discontinuance of specific programs or courses of study, and

any other options proposed by the state board or the accreditation team to allow the college to meet the program standards.

4. During the time specified in the plan for its implementation, the community college program remains accredited. The accreditation team shall revisit the community college and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the standards for the program have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board. The state board shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the program have been corrected.

5. If the deficiencies have not been corrected in a program of a community college, the community college board shall take one of the following actions within sixty days from removal of accreditation:

- a. Merge the deficient program or programs with a program or programs from another accredited community college.
- b. Contract with another educational institution for purposes of program delivery at the community college.
- c. Discontinue the program or programs which have been identified as deficient.

6. The director of the department of education shall give a community college which has a program which fails to meet accreditation standards at least one year's notice prior to removal of accreditation of the program. The notice shall be given by certified mail or restricted certified mail addressed to the superintendent of the community college and shall specify the reasons for removal of accreditation of the program. The notice shall also be sent by ordinary mail to each member of the board of directors of the community college. Any good faith error or failure to comply with the notice requirements shall not affect the validity of any action by the director. If, during the year, the community college remedies the reasons for removal of accreditation of the program and satisfies the director that the community college will comply with the accreditation standards for that program in the future, the director shall continue the accreditation of the program of the community college and shall transmit notice of the action to the community college by certified mail or restricted certified mail.

7. The action of the director to remove a community college's accreditation of the program may be appealed to the state board. At the hearing, the community college may be represented by counsel and may present evidence. The state board may provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported. If requested by the community college at least ten days before the hearing, the state board shall provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported at the expense of the community college, using any reasonable method specified by the community college. Within ten days after the hearing, the state board shall render a written decision, and shall affirm, modify, or vacate the action or proposed action to remove the college's accreditation of the program. Action by the state board is final agency action for purposes of chapter 17A.

90 Acts, ch 1253, §49; 90 Acts, ch 1254, § 2

C91, § 280A.47

92 Acts, ch 1040, §1

C93, § 260C.47

93 Acts, ch 82, § 5, 6, 11; 96 Acts, ch 1215, §34; 99 Acts, ch

114, §15; 2002 Acts, ch 1047, §6, 7, 20

Referred to in § 260C.36

#### 260C.48 STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITING COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS.

1. The state board shall develop standards and rules for the accreditation of community college programs. Except as provided in this subsection and subsection 4, standards developed shall be general in nature so as to apply to more than one specific program of instruction. With regard to community college-employed instructors, the standards adopted shall at a minimum require that full-time community college instructors meet the following requirements: a. Instructors in the subject area

of career and technical education shall be registered, certified, or licensed in the occupational area in which the state requires registration, certification, or licensure, and shall hold the appropriate registration, certificate, or license for the occupational area in which the instructor is teaching, and shall meet either of the following qualifications:

(1) A baccalaureate or graduate degree in the area or a related area of study or occupational area in which the instructor is teaching classes.

(2) Special training and at least six thousand hours of recent and relevant work experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes if the instructor possesses less than a baccalaureate degree.

b. Instructors in the subject area of arts and sciences shall meet either of the following qualifications:

(1) Possess a master's degree from a regionally accredited graduate school, and has successfully completed a minimum of twelve credit hours of graduate level courses in each field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes.

(2) Has two or more years of successful experience in a professional field or area in which the instructor is teaching classes and in which postbaccalaureate recognition or professional licensure is necessary for practice, including but not limited to the fields or areas of accounting, engineering, law, law enforcement, and medicine.

2. Standards developed shall include a provision that the standard academic workload for an instructor in arts and science courses shall be fifteen credit hours per school term, and the maximum academic workload for any instructor shall be sixteen credit hours per school term, for classes taught during the normal school day. In addition thereto, any faculty member may teach a course or courses at times other than the regular school week, involving total class instruction time equivalent to not more than a three-credit-hour course. The total workload for such instructors shall not exceed the equivalent of eighteen credit hours per school term.

3. Standards developed shall include provisions requiring equal access in recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs. The provisions shall include a requirement that students with special education needs shall receive instruction in the least restrictive environment with access to the full range of program offerings at a college, through, but not limited to, adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment, facilities, career guidance, and counseling services.

4. Commencing July 1, 2006, standards relating to quality assurance of faculty and ongoing quality professional development shall be the accreditation standards of the north central association of colleges and schools and the faculty standards required under specific programs offered by the community college that are accredited by other accrediting agencies.

90 Acts, ch 1253, §50; 90 Acts, ch 1254, § 3

C91, § 280A.48

C93, § 260C.48

93 Acts, ch 82, § 7, 8; 2002 Acts, ch 1047, §8, 9, 20

Referred to in § 260C.47

**APPENDIX B. IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCREDITATION TASK FORCE****Iowa Community College Accreditation Task Force**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
Beets, Ray	Director of Industrial Technology, Iowa Central Community College
Brock, Dr. Kathy	Vice President, Community Education and Academic Support, Northwest Iowa Community College
Bunker, Beverly	Bureau Chief, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, Iowa Department of Education
Chittenden, Robert	Executive Director of Research and Planning, Hawkeye Community College
Cook, Judy	Executive Director, Planning and Development, Iowa Lakes Community College
Crittenden, Dr. Barbara	President, Southwestern Community College
Friedel, Dr. Janice	Administrator, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, Iowa Department of Education
Grimm, Dr. Tom	Consultant, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, Iowa Department of Education
Groteluschen, Roger	Vice President of Financial Services and Facility Management, Iowa Valley Community College District
Hanson, Laurie	President, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Eastern Iowa Community College District
Johnson, Dr. Mark	Vice President, Academic Affairs, North Iowa Area Community College
Kinney, Dr. Dan	President, Iowa Western Community College
Kuehl, Marcia	Associate Dean of Instruction, Western Iowa Tech Community College
Noth, Dr. Nancy	Assistant Executive Director of Human Resources, Des Moines Area Community College
Silag, Dr. Bill	Administrative Consultant, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, Iowa Department of Education
Snyder, Jan	Vice President of Student and Institutional Development, Northwest Iowa Community College
Sprouse, Dr. Marlene	Vice President, Academic Affairs, Indian Hills Community College
Ubadigbo, Dr. Fidelis	Consultant, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, Iowa Department of Education
Van Steenhuyse, Kathleen	Dean of Social Sciences and Career Option Programs, Kirkwood Community College
Vande Berg, Ken	Vice President, Economic Development Services, Northeast Iowa Community College
Williams, Joan	Vice President of Student Services, Southeastern Community College

Source: Department of Education Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, 2005



## APPENDIX C. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Consent to Participate

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#### Transforming the Accreditation Model for the Community Colleges of Iowa: A Case Study

Jan E. Snyder  
October 2005 – February 2006  
Iowa State University of Science & Technology

You are requested to serve as a member from your college's administrative team to join in a qualitative research study that will explore the effectiveness of the current state accreditation process for Iowa's community colleges. Data collection for this doctoral dissertation case study will take place during the 2005/2006 academic year.

Several focus groups will be held across the state to support this research. A focus group will be held on your campus consisting of other members of your college's administrative team within the timeframe referenced. Each session is anticipated to last between 60-90 minutes in duration.

There are no known risks associated with this research. Your participation is voluntary and your individual response will be anonymous. You may withdraw from the research at anytime by contacting me.

The results of this research will be reported in a case study which will be written by myself as a doctoral candidate at Iowa State University of Science & Technology, under the advisement of my Program of Study Chair, Larry H. Ebberts, Ph.D.

Through your participation in this research, you will be part of a group of community college administrators and faculty who will have the opportunity to share your thoughts in transforming the current state accreditation process.

If you have any questions regarding this research or your involvement, do not hesitate to contact me:

Jan E. Snyder  
Northwest Iowa Community College  
603 West Park Street  
Sheldon, Iowa 51201  
jsnyder@nwicc.edu  
712.324.5061, ext. 125

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Signature of participant

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Date

## **Interview Protocol**

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**Project: Transforming the Accreditation Model for the Community Colleges of Iowa: A Case Study**

**Interviewers:**

**Interviewees:**

**Time:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Questions:**

**Is your college utilizing PEAQ or AQIP?**

**Where is your college in the accreditation cycle?**

**Is your institution's choice between PEAQ or AQIP indicative of a particular concept of the purpose of accreditation?**

**What do you perceive to be the potential value added by the state accreditation process?**

## APPENDIX D. CODED RESPONSES

### President 1 – P1

- “I was a member of the CAO group that developed the initial state criteria in 1991 (P – 1, p.13).
- “My college is preparing for PEAQ site visit in April of 2006. There is an internal discussion to move to AQIP following our PEAQ review” (P – 1, p.13).
- “It is more helpful to an institution to keep accreditation at the forefront” (P – 1, p.13).
- “The state accreditation process and NCA process need to be as closely aligned as possible” (P – 1, p.13).
- “Currently accreditation is viewed as an assignment. College gets a grade and then any further consideration of the process go away” (P – 1, p.13).
- “My preference is for the state to come prior to NCA. I don’t think the state needs to make an annual visit” (P – 1, p.13).
- “State crosswalk has been helpful as we have prepared for the PEAQ visit” (P – 1, p.13).
- “Equity should be separate from accreditation – we all report annually on equity through the strategic plan” (P – 1, p.13).
- “Assessment gives concrete evidence of support” (P – 1, p. 13)
- “Institution should develop assessment process – DE should not be concerned with process but how the college is responding to data gleaned from the process” (P – 1, p.13).
- “Assessment has value when you forced to look at it” (P – 1, p. 13).

### President 2 – P2

- “President’s have not been interested in this issue. They have delegated to other who don’t have experience”(P – 2, p.17).
- “Look at the Iowa criteria against the HLC criteria” (P – 2, p.17).
- “Accreditation is about what the institution is doing” (P – 2, p.17).
- “What colleges are being evaluated on are the five new criteria of the NCA-HLC. PEAQ and AQIP are the processes that a college can choose to affirm that they are addressing the criteria” (P – 2, p.17).
- “The five evaluative criteria are the system; PEAQ and AQIP are the processes” (P – 2, p.17).
- “Accreditation flows from your mission statement” (P – 2, p.17).
- “Self Study: Cycle – Systems Portfolio: Annual” (P – 2, p.17).
- “You’re going to be evaluated against the five HLC criteria” (P – 2, p.17).
- “New president’s don’t have a clue about the Higher Learning Commission’s expectations” (P – 2, p.17).
- “Use the same terminology for HLC and Iowa” (P – 2, p.18).
- “Accreditation wants you to know that you are addressing compliance issues” P – 2, p.17).
- “HLC is not “Gotcha” (P – 2, p.18).
- “The process should include patterns of evidence and compliance” (P – 2, p.18).
- “Create a draft from the Task Force and the President’s can see the output” (P – 2, p.18).

### IACCT Administrator – ED

- “It is important to dovetail the state accreditation process with NCA” (ED, p.15).
- “The state accreditation process gives the DE and the colleges perspective” (ED, p.15).
- “The DE and the colleges are concerned with quality” (ED, p.15).
- “Legislators said we need the state accreditation process” (ED, p.15).
- “Colleges receive value in going through the process” (ED, p.15).

“Increase communication on quality – if they get it at all, they will understand how important it is” (ED, p.15).

“I do hear comments regarding the necessity of the state accreditation process” (ED, p.15).

“Accreditation serves as an internal morale booster. My former college had a successful ten year accreditation which I feel helped support a successful bond levy.” (ED, p.15).

“The president is the coordinator of the Self Study” (ED, p.15).

“I have heard no conversation among presidents regarding AQIP/PEAQ preference” (ED, p.15).

“The state accreditation process is an important process” (ED, p.15).

“Regents wanted off the state accreditation committee” (ED, p.16).

### **Community College – 1: (CC – 1)**

#### ***Question 1***

“October, 2004 we received a full ten year accreditation until 2014 utilizing the PEAQ process with the new criteria” (CC – 1, p.1).

#### ***Question 2***

“The college is currently going through a presidential transition and are allowing the new president to get settled” (CC – 1, p.1).

“Realize that within a period of time after PEAQ accreditation, you have the opportunity to go through the essential steps for AQIP” (CC – 1, p.1).

“It was a very conscious decision not to go to AQIP due to the amount of work, staff and expense” (CC -1, p.1).

“Right now we do not have to address assessment of student learning and curriculum based on comments from the 2004 NCA visit” (CC – 1, p.1).

“The difference between DE and NCA accreditation processes is that the DE recognizes non-credit and NCA does not” (CC – 1, p.1).

“Non-credit side is good for the state” (CC – 1, p.1).

#### ***Question 3***

“Accreditation is a process we have to complete” (CC – 1, p.1).

“The purpose of accreditation is process improvement” (CC – 1, p.1).

“Accreditation supports improvement of instruction” (CC – 1, p.1).

“We currently have the PEAQ process in place” (CC – 1, p.2).

“More people are transitioning to AQIP” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Accreditation is a good step – it challenges us to look where we were, where we are, and where we are going” (CC – 1, p.2).

“We measure our mission by voter approval, employer satisfaction, contributions to the Foundation, graduation rate, and time devoted to really good institutional research” (CC – 1, p.2).

“We need to be more integrated – five year program review, assessment, accreditation” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Quality improvement is the goal” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Accreditation, assessment, and program review processes should be flowing” (CC – 1, p.2)

“Nichols assessment for T& T needs to be changed” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Nichols went for “flashy”, forgot what they were doing on an on-going basis. Vocational education has always been; quantify, review, change, implement, continue.” (CC – 1, p.2).

#### ***Question 4***

“Mid cycle visit is somewhat of a dog and pony show” (CC – 1, p.2).

“The state visit assisted us before the official NCA visit” (CC – 1, p.2).

“The state visit assists in areas where we need help” (CC – 1, p.2).

“The DE could assist colleges as they know what the accreditation hot buttons are”

(CC – 1, p.2).

“The DE carries the news on information or direction on how the accreditation process is moving”  
(CC – 1, p.2).

“Provide a set of definitions with the revised criteria” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Report accreditation issues to presidents, chief academic officers, chief student service officers, and deans” (CC – 1, p.2).

“The DE Annual Administrator’s Conference could include best practices” (CC – 1p.2).

“The DE cannot be prescriptive – they can guard state code” (CC – 1, p.2).

“Crosswalk was nice as far as reporting back” (CC – 1, p.2).

“We would be comfortable for the state to adopt the NCA criteria along with those areas required by the code” (CC – 1, p.2).

## **Community College – 2: CC – 2**

### ***Question 1***

“2003 was our last visit under the traditional accreditation methodology” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Down the path we are looking at AQIP” (CC – 2, p.3).

### ***Question 2***

“Our institution has a history of implementing continuous quality improvement (CQI) methodology.  
(CC – 2, p.3).

“We have talked about many AQIP processes” (CC – 2, p.3).

### ***Question 3***

“Future choice would be toward quality improvement” (CC – 2, p.3).

“An example of a quality process was the – 1992 High School Partnership process – the question was, can you prove rigor of PSEO to the college president? The following quality measures were monitored; quality control studies – compare and contrast high school with campus data; show the high school control group; top 1/3 of class go onto PSEO; track ACT/ITEDS; and match pair designs” (CC – 2, p.3).

“There has been an improvement in general education and program review” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Use data to improve” (CC – 2, p.3).

Mission – purpose – program goals – classes: do not link up to programmatic goals” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Okay with program review” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Improve with what you are doing” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Academic dean’s eye is on the bigger picture” (CC – 2, p.3).

### ***Question 4***

“The state accreditation process needs to align with NCA” (CC – 2, p.3).

“The 1989 process was quite divergent from NCA” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Supplemental information needs to be added because it is not under NCA” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Colleagues in Iowa coming on campus is more beneficial because they know more about the colleges” (CC – 2, p.3).

“Peer review most valuable for Iowa team” (CC – 2, p.3)

“Accreditation extremely valuable and very useful” (CC – 2, p.4).

“Accreditation provides a broader way of thinking about yourself” (CC – 2, p.4).

“Accreditation gets everybody on the same page” (CC – 2, p.4).

“There is a problem with the state strategic plan. It is hard to get 15 colleges to come together to agree on a major plan that will make a difference” (CC – 2, p.4).

“Equity is a compliance issue and the DE has a right to check these initiatives” (CC – 2, p.4).

“What colleges are being evaluated on are the five new criteria of the NCA – HLC. PEAQ and AQIP are the processes that a college can choose to affirm that they are addressing the criteria” (P – 2, p.17).

“Accreditation Flows from your mission statement” (P. – 2, p.17).

### **Community College – 3: (CC – 3)**

#### ***Question 1***

“April of 2002 was the last formal visit under the traditional criteria” (CC – 3, p.5).

“It took the college three years to decide which direction they wanted their future accreditation to go” (CC – 3, p.5).

“...returned from the Strategy Forum in Chicago and will finalize their Action Projects by December. Our action projects are: communications, curriculum, and advising architecture (on-line and face to face)” (CC – 3, p.5).

#### ***Question 2***

“The college has done a better job of planning as a result of the Conversation Day” (CC – 3, p.5).

“The CAO felt that workload was an issue that’s why they went for the Vital Focus Visit “(CC – 3, p.5).

“The quality agenda has its ups and downs” (CC – 3, p.5).

“Faculty representation on the AQIP Steering Committee” (CC – 3, p.5).

“CC – 3 is also a member of Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQN)” (CC – 3, p.5).

“The College was recognized as a CQN Pacesetter along with another Iowa Community College” (CC – 3, p.5).

“It is important for quality efforts to supply college with a different set of lenses” (CC – 3, p.5).

“Colleges quality agenda is CQN primary, accreditation/AQIP secondary” (CC – 3, p.5).

“A concern with AQIP is that there is not a lot of underlying architecture. In Chicago we seem to swim around AQIP. Start with three Action Projects that fold into a System’s Portfolio” (CC – 3, p.5).

“ASAP – Awesome Special Action Projects was a model that was borrowed from another Iowa AQIP community college” (CC – 3, p.5).

“A quality agenda encompasses all” (CC – 3, p.5).

“We shouldn’t let accreditation drive the organization” (CC – 3, p.6).

“PEAQ appears to be more reflective, whereas AQIP is more forward thinking” (CC – 3, p.5).

“Quality journey is greater than a strategic plan” (CC – 3, p.6).

“Old ten year process is more of a rubber stamp” (CC – 3, p.6).

#### ***Question 3***

“On one hand, accreditation is voluntary; we do not have to be accredited. On the other hand, accreditation is necessary. There are important things you cannot access without it (CC – 3, p.6).

“The state should create an appropriate model without being prescriptive” (CC – 3, p.6). (CC – 3, p.6).

“Accreditation provides a framework for president, board, stakeholders to say you are doing what you are doing” (CC – 3, p.6).

“Accreditation is a minimum entry into the larger arena of higher education” (CC – 3, p.6).

“AQIP encourages organizations to move forward, will help to keep accreditation on the radar screen” (CC – 3, p.6).

“The entire college community was involved in Conversation Day. An on-line survey was conducted prior to Conversation Day” (CC – 3, p.6).

“Our quality agenda is now a quality journey. People come together to participate in dialog. There is a renewed/reinvigorated sense of quality initiatives” (CC – 3, p.6).

**Question 4**

- “The state needs to work with prescriptive aspect. There are additional standards from the state” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “There is a difference between changing Code and changing Rules” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “I would like to see the same accreditation process as privates and Regent institutions” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “I don’t know what benefit state accreditation has” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “The state visit is a good practice session for NCA visit” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “Develop some sort of structure that works for us” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “I ultimately see the state accessing the college website on an annual basis for System Portfolio and Action Project results” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “We are okay with the assessment process running through accreditation” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “Make HLC and state criteria the same. If there must be a process for the state of Iowa, it should be that same for the state as it is for the HLC. That will provide the community colleges with what they need to conduct their quality journeys, based on their own architecture of quality” (CC – 3, p.6).
- “Take the same accreditation report. Copy it. Put “NCA Administrative Consultant”: cover page on one and a “DE Administrative Consultant” cover page on the other” (CC – 3, p.6).

**Community College – 4: (CC – 4)****Question 1**

- “The last PEAQ accreditation action was in 1996: At that time, the district came together to be accredited as a single entity. Accreditation now includes the two district colleges that prior to 1996 were separately-accredited institutions: one which was first accredited in 1963 and one that was first accredited in 1966” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “Best part of AQIP is that every year we address issues” (CC – 4, p.7).

**Question 2**

- “We are a Baldrige School – Institution with a Total Quality Management (TQM) effort” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “We are involved with Action Project and the Systems Portfolio – AQIP evaluators are supposed to come every four years” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “With AQIP there is an institutional requirement that you are always engaged in improvement” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “We have mechanisms to get same data every year” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “AQIP will keep evolving” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “Feds are so on edge that they need to keep doing their job. Accreditation will link with “No Child Left Behind. We may see “No College Left Behind” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “We’re doing really good work and that is what we are going to continue to keep doing” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “HLC has to prove to DC that they are viable” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “Worst thing the state could do is list their own set of criteria”(CC – 4, p.7).
- “The System’s Portfolio is so comprehensive it needs to cross over five criteria” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “Write a crossover to the state criteria” (CC – 4, p.7).
- “The System’s Portfolio makes us a better school” (CC – 4, p.8).
- “National Community College Benchmark Project through Johnson County Community College and the Community College Survey on Student Engagement are part of the Portfolio” (CC – 4, p.8).
- “Can drop Action Plans at any time – succeeded by events” (CC – 4, p.8).
- “We employ ASAP – Awesome Special Action Projects” (CC – 4, p.8).
- “Update on annual Action Projects from NCA” (CC – 4, p.8).



“Accreditation is on the Executive Council agenda regularly” (CC – 4, p.8).

“Our Action Plans are; decision making – upper levels, data collection improvements, student reporting, student satisfaction, assessment and diversity” (CC – 4, p.8).

### **Question 3**

“People want to see results on how we improve educational processes” (CC – 4, p.8).

“Accreditation was promised as an extension of TQM” (CC – 4, p.8).

“...colleges facts and resources and System’s Portfolio are located on the website” (CC – 4, p.8).

“Quality management tools drove institution to AQIP” (CC – 4, p.8).

“Accreditation and accountability are what I am committed to” (CC – 4, p.8).

“We wanted quality to become part of our culture. There is a commitment to continuous quality improvement.” CC – 4, p.8).

“Our mission statement is the 14 points in the Iowa Code” (CC – 4, p.8).

“AQIP causes us to be more efficient” (CC – 4, p.8).

“We pull from our portfolio to support our strategic plan” (CC – 4, p.8).

### **Question 4**

“No state AQIP” (CC – 4, p.8).

“The state process was a good frontrunner to NCA” (CC – 4, p.9).

“The state accreditation should compliment the quality faculty plan and minimum standards” (CC – 4, p.9).

“Just understanding the state strategic goals has been a challenge” ( CC – 4, p. 9).

“...tenth criteria should be state issues/state strategic plan” (CC – 4, p.9).

“State accreditation validates what state wants you to do” (CC – 4, p.9).

“Quality Faculty Plan came about at the right time” (CC – 4, p.9).

## **Community College – 5: (CC – 5)**

### **Question 1**

“We have completed one full AQIP cycle which includes two strategy forums one in 2000 where  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the projects were evaluated and one in 2005 where multiple projects were evaluated”. (CC – 5, p.10).

### **Question 2**

“We have completed one full AQIP cycle which includes two strategy forums one in 2000 where  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the projects were evaluated and one in 2005 where multiple projects were evaluated”. (CC – 5, p.10).

“First set of Action Projects completed were developmental ed, transition to work and other colleges, alternative delivery” (CC – 5, p.10).

“We are waiting for our AQIP site visit in 2006 which will be a 2 – 3 person team” (CC – 5, p.10).

“The strategic plan is aligned with accreditation. There are eight District wide goals. All colleges and continuing education were asked to complete a goal. There are outcome measures for each goal. All have a sponsor” (CC – 5, p.10).

“Some AQIP projects fit into the strategic plan” (CC – 5, p.10).

“The Systems Portfolio is comprehensive. It is read by a team of examiners who point out the strengths and weaknesses.” (CC – 5, p.10).

“Baldrige has no substance” (CC – 5, p.10).

“AQIP is tied to teaching and learning” (CC – 5, p.10).

“Nine AQIP criteria fitting into the five criteria” (CC – 5, p.10).

“AQIP is a work in process” (CC – 5, p.11).

“AQIP fits into five criteria” (CC – 5, p.10).



“Nursing and EMS programs need letter of accreditation” (CC – 5, p.11).

“Any integration between the state and NCA would be fantastic. Embed HLC criteria into state code” (CC – 5, p. 11 - 12).

### **Question 3**

“Accreditation is a continuous quality improvement process” (CC – 5, p.11).

“The purpose of the journey is improving processes – outcome is accreditation. We need to marry accreditation with process improvement” (CC – 5, p.11).

“Accreditation is mission driven and student focused” (CC – 5, p.11).

“Most schools are doing the best they can for their students with the resources they have” (CC – 5, p.11).

“In 1992 we started CQI creating a quality culture, training and leadership”.

“It is appropriate for an outside group to look at fiscal reports. Our auditors report our annual fiscal picture” (CC – 5, p.11).

“We need a lead person, someone with institutional research to crunch the data” (CC – 5, p.11).

“A culture of continuous improvement, with decision making driven by data” (CC – 5, p.11).

“We need to evaluate everything we do” (CC – 5, p.11).

“Fifteen individuals went to the national CQN Conference” (CC – 5, p.11).

“People in the community sit up and take respect when you look at quality” (CC – 5, p.12).

“Accreditation allows us to pull best practices from across the state (CC – 5, p. 12).

“We are going to be sitting out of Baldrige and IRP” (CC – 5, p.12).

“Accreditation should be a very participatory process” (CC – 5, p.12).

### **Question 4**

“Accreditation must have the QFP” (CC – 5, p.12).

“Accreditation generates conversations regarding quality” (CC – 5, p.12).

“Develop rubric for state to comply with” (CC – 5, p.12).

“AQIP has taken high stakes out of the visit” (CC – 5, p.12).

“...need to educate the State Board to move toward AQIP” (CC – 5, p.12).

“The state is value added: we were the first state to have a state accreditation process” (CC – 5, p.12).

“The state need to keep us accountable in a way that is healthy” (CC – 5, p.12).

“Choose info out of the State of the Community College Annual Report for benchmarks” (CC – 5, p.12).

### APPENDIX E. TIMELINE

<b>IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCREDITATION PROCESS REVIEW TIMELINE</b>	
<b>DATE (RANGE)</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
Sep 1–Nov 1	<p>Task Force receives new long-term schedule for completing revision of Iowa accreditation guidelines</p> <p>Telenet Task Force meeting to obtain approval of new long-term schedule</p> <p>Interviews/Presentations/Focus Groups, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presidents (dates TBA)</li> <li>Chief Academic Officers (Oct date TBA)</li> <li>Student Services Deans (will meet Sep 16)</li> <li>Arts and Sciences Deans (will meet Sep 23)</li> <li>CTE Deans (Oct date TBA)</li> <li>HLC peer reviewers (meetings now underway)</li> <li>Division staff (Oct date TBA)</li> </ul> <p>Completion of Work Team assignments</p> <p><b>Mission and Integrity</b> (Has not met as a team as of Sep 1, but most Team members have been interviewed)</p> <p><b>Planning for the Future</b> (drafting as of Sep 1)</p> <p><b>Student Learning and Effective Teaching</b> (Faculty Standards sub-group (met Jun 27); Student Services Deans meet Sep 16; newly formed Assessment sub-group (Oct date TBA); Program Development/Review sub-group (met Jul 13))</p> <p><b>Service and Engagement</b> (drafting as of Sep 1)</p> <p><b>Assessment</b> (newly formed; will meet Sep date TBA)</p> <p><i>Administrators Forum (Oct 13-14): Break in activity</i></p>
Nov 1–15, 2005	Silag/Snyder compile Work Teams' input, produce draft of revised guidelines, focusing on accreditation criteria
<i>Nov 15–Dec 1, 2005</i>	<i>Thanksgiving: Break in activity</i>
Dec 1–15, 2005	Silag/Snyder consult with Division Administrator and Bureau Chief, expanding draft of revised guidelines to cover accreditation process as a whole
<i>Dec 15–31, 2005</i>	<i>Christmas: Break in activity</i>
Jan 1–15, 2006	Task Force receives draft of revised guidelines for review
Jan 15–Feb 1, 2006	Face-to-face or ICN Task Force meeting to discuss draft of revised guidelines
Feb 1–15, 2006	Task Force recommendations incorporated into revised guidelines
Feb 15–Mar 1, 2006	Revised guidelines discussed at IACCP and IACCT meetings
Mar 1–15, 2006	Revised guidelines submitted to Community College Council for discussion
Mar 15-Apr 1, 2006	Task Force signs off on revised accreditation guidelines
Apr 1-15, 2006	Final draft of revised accreditation guidelines submitted to Division Administrator for approval
Apr 15–May 1, 2006	Presentation of revised accreditation guidelines to State Board of Education

**APPENDIX F. GUIDE FOR THE STATE ACCREDITATION  
OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

**GUIDE FOR STATE ACCREDITATION  
OF IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGES**



**Iowa Department of Education**  
Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation  
Grimes State Office Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

**February 10, 2006**  
**State of Iowa**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Grimes State Office Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

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## PREFACE

The changing role of community colleges in higher education and increasing emphasis on institutional effectiveness led to the passage of legislation in 1990 requiring the creation of state accreditation standards for Iowa's community colleges. This legislation outlined requirements for new standards and a new accreditation process for community colleges that addresses issues of quality, access, accountability, and institutional improvement.

In the spring of 1991, Iowa Department of Education (DE) established a cross-departmental work team to coordinate development of the accreditation process and standards. The team's philosophy held that rather than being prescriptive, the new standards should provide goals toward which colleges should strive, including those qualities that characterize the best in community college education. The team also decided that community college involvement was essential to the success of this project and, therefore, organized a task force on accreditation and program review made up of community college chief academic officers. An accreditation advisory committee – including representatives of business and industry, government, and other stakeholder groups – was formed to gather broad community input.

By October 1992, the work team and the task force had reached consensus on a preliminary set of 47 standards. Each standard was accompanied by a rationale to clarify its purpose. Input on these preliminary standards was sought through 15 open forums conducted across the state in late 1992. The work team and task force used the input to make revisions. In order to move away from the concept of minimum accreditation standards and assist in communicating the institutional improvement focus of the accreditation process, the *Preliminary Accreditation Standards* were renamed the *State Criteria for Evaluation of Iowa Community Colleges*. The State Board approved 36 state criteria and a pilot process in June 1994. Information from the pilot process in 1995 and 1996 resulted in a recommendation from community college personnel that the number of criteria be reduced through consolidation of similar criteria. In August 1997, the State Board adopted 18 criteria. The rules for community college accreditation became effective on October 1, 1997.

The recent development of the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) and a major revision of the Commission's accreditation criteria (See Appendix 1, FAQ 2) in early 2005 prompts extensive changes in Iowa's community college accreditation guidelines. These changes are detailed in the pages that follow. Changes pertaining to the state's community colleges have also been made in the Iowa Administrative Code. (See Appendix 3) Most significant is a new alignment of Iowa's accreditation criteria and core components with those of HLC. For more than a decade, the accreditation cycles of HLC and the Iowa DE have been coincident. Now the content of their respective accreditation processes will be much the same, whether a college has adopted HLC's AQIP process or continues to prepare for accreditation using the Commission's more traditional Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ). Each of the HLC criteria and core components aligns exactly with state accreditation criteria and core components. Iowa's accreditation process addresses four *additional* state-specific standards as well: Faculty minimums, faculty load, persons with special needs, and vocational education evaluation.

As in the past, DE staff has benefited greatly from the willingness of Iowa's community college educators to share their views regarding accreditation and institutional improvement during the process of revising the accreditation guidelines. DE staff is particularly grateful to the Accreditation Task Force, which included representatives from each of the state's 15 community colleges and other key stakeholder groups, for overseeing the process of revising the guidelines.

## Section 1

### IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACCREDITATION: AN OVERVIEW

The purpose of accreditation of Iowa's community colleges is to confirm that each college is offering quality programs and services to its constituents. This is especially important with respect to the colleges' dual mission to address the economic well-being of Iowa through improved workforce preparation and to prepare community college students for transfer to baccalaureate institutions.

#### PEAQ and AQIP: The Accreditation Processes of the Higher Learning Commission

The HLC supports two processes by which postsecondary educational institutions can maintain their institutional accreditation – PEAQ and AQIP. With this revision of the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges*, the Iowa DE accepts either HLC-approved accreditation processes as its own.

- » The Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) adheres to key elements of a traditional approach to accreditation. PEAQ begins with an institutional self-study, relies on peer review, focuses on decision-making processes, and operates on a ten-year cycle.
- » The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) operates on a seven-year cycle. More significantly, AQIP adheres to continuous quality improvement principles derived from the Baldrige National Quality Program. Before its acceptance into AQIP, an institution conducts an intensive self-assessment – similar in nature to PEAQ's self-study – followed by an HLC-conducted strategy forum where the institution plans three or more action projects to help it meet key goals identified in its self-assessment. The self-assessment and the action projects become part of the institution's systems portfolio which is reviewed and approved prior to the institution's acceptance into AQIP. During the seven years of its AQIP cycles, institutions are required to provide HLC with annual updates on its Systems Portfolio. These updates detail progress on current action projects (three years is the typical duration of each action project) and on the Systems Portfolio in general.

The examples of evidence included with the criteria and core components in these guidelines are identical to HLC examples of evidence. However, regardless of which process a college chooses, state accreditation requires compliance with four additional standards specified in the Iowa Code. These four Code-prescribed standards are described on pages 17–19 below.

Like HLC, the Iowa DE conducts on-site accreditation visits to PEAQ and AQIP colleges, every ten years for the former and seven years for the latter. HLC and DE visits must occur as close to one another as the college's schedule will permit, but certainly during the same school year.

PEAQ accreditation procedures directly address accreditation criteria and core components as specified by HLC and Iowa accreditation guidelines. AQIP procedures may require that data collected for a Systems Portfolio be reframed to address the criteria and core components. AQIP publications and staff consultations can provide assistance in this regard. An example of one approach to reframing appears in Appendix 5. (HLC conducts an ongoing discussion of AQIP principles and methods, including the relationship between HLC criteria and AQIP categories, on the AQIP website: [www.aqip.org](http://www.aqip.org))

#### Focus Evaluation

With the approval of the Director, a focus evaluation may be conducted if the situation at a particular college warrants. Focus evaluations may be recommended by an evaluation team, the Iowa Board of Education, or the Director of the Iowa Department of Education. The DE will assemble a focus evaluation team of at least one DE person and one community college person. The focus evaluation may include a site visit to the college. Once initiated, a focus evaluation on a specific subject will be conducted annually until problems are resolved or changes are fully approved and implemented. The DE is to be informed by the college of any focus evaluations required by HLC.

## Section 2

### IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STATE ACCREDITATION

Each community college is subject to accreditation by the State Board of Education, as provided in Iowa Code Section 260C.47. The State Board of Education shall grant accreditation if a community college meets the following criteria and core components, which are identical to those of HLC. The accompanying examples of evidence – which contain some items specific to Iowa community college accreditation – were developed by teams composed of DE and community college staff.

#### HLC Accreditation

In order to be accredited by the Iowa State Board of Education and maintain accreditation status, a community college must be accredited by the HLC.

#### Source of documentation:

Official letter of HLC accreditation status (*Required*)

#### Iowa Accreditation Criteria, Core Components, Patterns of Evidence, and Potential Sources of Documentation

Iowa's community college accreditation criteria (listed below by number) and core components (listed by letter) align precisely with HLC's criteria and core components. The examples of evidence (listed with bullets under each core component) are drawn from previous Iowa accreditation guidelines, HLC literature, and stakeholder input. Each criterion is also accompanied by a bulleted list of possible sources of documentation. Lists of possible sources are meant to be suggestive only. Accreditation team members will not expect the college to reference all or only the sources listed in these guidelines. For the convenience of accreditation team members, sample criterion evaluation forms are provided in Appendix 6.

*Permission to adopt the following HLC criteria and core components for use in Iowa's community college accreditation process has been granted in writing by the HLC.*

#### Criterion 1. Mission and Integrity

*The organization operates with integrity to ensure fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.*

##### a. The college's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the college's commitments.

The college's board has adopted statements of mission, vision, values, goals, and organizational priorities that together clearly and broadly define the college's mission.

The mission, vision, values, and goals documents define the college's varied internal and external constituencies the organization intends to serve.

The college's mission documents include a strong commitment to high academic standards that sustain and advance excellence in higher learning.

The college's mission documents state goals for the learning to be achieved by all its students.

The college regularly evaluates and, when appropriate, revises the mission documents.

The college makes the mission documents available to the public, particularly to prospective and enrolled students current students.

##### b. In its mission documents, the college recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.

- In its mission documents, the college addresses diversity within the community values and common purposes the college considers fundamental to its mission.
- The college's mission documents present the organization's function in a multicultural society and a global economy.
- The mission documents affirm the college's commitment to honor the dignity and worth of all individuals.
- The college's required codes of acceptable behavior are congruent with its mission.



**c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the college.**

- The college's board, administration, faculty, staff, and students understand and support the college's mission.
- The college's strategic decisions are mission-driven.
- The college's planning and budgeting priorities flow from and support the mission.
- The goals of the administrative and academic subunits of the college are congruent with the college's mission.
- The college's internal constituencies articulate the mission in a consistent manner.

**d. The college's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the college to fulfill its mission.**

Board policies and practices document the board's focus on the college's mission.

The board enables the college's chief administrative personnel to exercise effective leadership.

The distribution of responsibilities as defined in governance structures, processes, and activities is understood and is implemented through delegated authority.

People within the governance and administrative structures are committed to the mission and appropriately qualified to carry out their defined responsibilities.

Faculty and other academic leaders share responsibility for the coherence of the college's curriculum and the integrity of academic processes.

Effective communication facilitates governance processes and activities.

The college evaluates its structures and processes regularly and strengthens them as needed.

**e. The college upholds and protects its integrity.**

The honesty of the organization in its operations

The congruence between what an organization's mission documents say the organization is about and what it actually does

The reputation of the organization

The fairness with which it interacts with internal and external constituencies

The practice of knowing and abiding by relevant laws and regulations

***The Range of Potential Sources of Documentation for Criterion 1 (Mission and Integrity) Is Suggested by the Following:***

- » Written statements of the college's mission, vision, values, and goals
- » Board policy manual
- » Minutes of Board meetings
- » Current organizational chart
- » Official college catalog
- » Publications and advertising describing the college's operations and programs
- » Written plans and procedures for involvement of faculty, staff, and students in governance and methods of dissemination to the college's constituents
- » Written procedures for evaluation and revision of the college's mission and policies, based on assessment of the needs of the college's constituents
- » Documentation that college policies are communicated and implemented
- » Contractual agreements with other agencies that reflect ethical institutional standards
- » Written human resources policy and procedures
- » Documents describing employment and personnel policies and practices
- » Documentation of the college's Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action (EEO/AA) plan
- » Policy documents describing codes of professional behavior for staff
- » Written procedures for handling student and staff complaints

**Criterion 2. Preparing for the Future**

*The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.*



- a. The college realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.**
- The college's planning documents reflect a sound understanding of the college's current capacity.
  - The college's planning documents demonstrate that attention is being paid to emerging factors such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.
  - The college's planning documents show careful attention to the college's function in a multicultural society.
  - The college's planning processes include effective environmental scanning.
  - The college environment is supportive of innovation and change.
  - The college incorporates in its planning those aspects of its history and heritage that it wishes to preserve and continue.
  - The college clearly identifies authority for decision making about college goals.
- b. The college's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.**
- The college's resources are adequate for achievement of the educational quality it claims to provide. The college's plans for resource development and allocation document an organizational commitment to supporting and strengthening the quality of the education it provides.
- The college uses its human resources effectively.
- The college intentionally develops its human resources to meet future changes.
- The college's history of financial resource development and investment documents a forward-looking concern for ensuring educational quality (e.g., investments in faculty development, technology, learning support services, and new or renovated facilities).
- The college's planning processes are flexible enough to respond to unanticipated needs for program reallocation, down-sizing, or growth.
- The college has a history of achieving its planning goals.
- c. The college's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.**
- The college demonstrates that its evaluation processes provide evidence that its performance meets its stated expectations for institutional effectiveness.
  - The college maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing, and using organizational information.
  - Appropriate data and feedback loops are available and used throughout the college to support continuous improvement.
  - Periodic reviews of academic and administrative sub-units contribute to improvement of the college.
  - The college provides adequate support for its evaluation and assessment processes.
- d. All levels of planning align with the college's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.**
- Coordinated planning processes center on the mission documents that define vision, values, goals, and strategic priorities for the college.
  - Planning processes link with budgeting processes.
  - Implementation of the college's planning is evident in its operations.
  - Long-range strategic planning processes allow for reprioritization of goals when necessary because of changing environments.
  - Planning documents give evidence of the college's awareness of relationships among educational quality, student learning, and the diverse, complex, global, and technological world in which the organization and its students exist.
  - Planning processes involve internal constituents and, where appropriate, external constituents.

***The Range of Potential Sources of Documentation for Criterion 2 (Preparing for the Future) Is Suggested by the Following:***

- » Annual external audit and management letter
- » Cash flow review and fund balance analysis

- » Description of institutional effectiveness measures that have been identified
- » Documents showing appropriate data is collected and analyzed consistent with strategic goals
- » Documents showing short and long-range plans reflect needs assessment
- » Evidence of faculty, staff, students, trustees, and community involvement in planning.
- » Minutes of strategic planning committee meetings
- » Planning documents indicating that financial expenditures the college's publicly stated commitment to offerings and services.
- » Strategic plan that includes a mission statement, strategic goals, and strategies for addressing goals
- » Written description of college's procedure for storing records and archiving key college documents

### **Criterion 3. Student Learning and Effective Teaching**

*The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.*

#### **a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.**

- The college clearly differentiates its learning goals for programs by identifying the expected learning outcomes for each.
- Assessment of student learning provides evidence at multiple levels: course, program, and institutional.
- Assessment of student learning includes multiple direct and indirect measures of student learning.
- Results obtained through assessment of student learning are available to appropriate constituencies, including students themselves.
- The college integrates into its processes for assessment of student learning and uses the data reported for purposes of external accountability (e.g., graduation rates, passage rates on licensing exams, placement rates, transfer rates).
- The college's assessment of student learning extends to all educational offerings, including credit and noncredit certificate programs.
- Faculty are involved in defining expected student learning outcomes and creating the strategies to determine whether those outcomes are achieved.
- Faculty and administrators routinely review the effectiveness and uses of the college's program to assess student learning.

#### **b. The college values and supports effective teaching.**

- Qualified faculty determines curricular content and strategies for instruction.
- The college supports professional development designed to facilitate teaching suited to varied learning environments.
- The college evaluates teaching and recognizes effective teaching.
- The college provides services to support improved pedagogies.
- The college demonstrates openness to innovative practices that enhance learning.
- The college supports faculty in keeping abreast of research on teaching and learning, and of technological advances that can enhance student learning and improve delivery of instruction.
- Faculty members actively participate in professional organizations relevant to the disciplines they teach.

#### **c. The college creates effective learning environments.**

- Assessment results inform improvements in curriculum, pedagogy, instructional resources, and student services.
- The college provides an environment that supports all learners and respects the diversity they bring.
- Advising systems focus on student learning, including the mastery of skills required for academic success.
- Student development programs support learning throughout the student's experience regardless of the location of the student.
- The college employs, when appropriate, new technologies that enhance effective learning environments for students.

- The college's systems of quality assurance include regular review of whether its educational strategies, activities, processes, and technologies enhance student learning.

**d. The college's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.**

- The college ensures access to the resources (e.g., research laboratories, libraries, performance spaces, clinical practice sites) necessary to support learning and teaching.
- The college evaluates the use of its learning resources to enhance student learning and effective teaching.
- The college regularly assesses the effectiveness of its learning resources to support learning and teaching.
- The college supports students, staff, and faculty in using technology effectively.
- The college provides effective staffing and support for its learning resources.
- The college's systems and structures enable partnerships and innovations that enhance student learning and strengthen teaching effectiveness.
- Budgeting priorities reflect that improvement in teaching and learning is a core value of the college.

***The Range of Potential Sources of Documentation for Criterion 3 (Student Learning and Effective Teaching) Is Suggested by the Following:***

- » Official college catalog
- » Descriptions of programs offered, with locations and current enrollments
- » Published policies regarding degree, diploma, and certificate requirements
- » Written description(s) of academic entrance requirements and expected competencies
- » Recruiting material (including view books) for prospective students
- » Documentation of implementation and results of strategies to recruit, enroll, retain, and successfully serve students in nontraditional careers, students from under-represented racial and ethnic groups, English language learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and other nontraditional students
- » Samples of printed and online material included in orientation process for students, along with schedule of orientation activities
- » Written descriptions of methods used to assess effectiveness at department, program, and institutional levels
- » Written description of services available to under-prepared students
- » Documentation of kinds and amounts of financial aid available and records describing methods of dissemination of financial aid information
- » Reports of the college's compliance with established standards regarding accessibility of facilities
- » User statistics documenting availability of study space
- » Campus safety reports

**Criterion 4. Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge**

*The college promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.*

**a. The college demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.**

- The college's planning and pattern of financial allocation demonstrate that it values and promotes a life of learning for its students, faculty, and staff.
- The board has approved and disseminated statements supporting freedom of inquiry for the college's students, faculty, and staff, and honors those statements in its practices.
- The college supports professional development opportunities and makes them available to all administrators, faculty, and staff.
- The college publicly acknowledges the achievements of students and faculty in acquiring, discovering, and applying knowledge.
- The faculty and students, in keeping with the college's mission, produce scholarship and create knowledge through basic and applied research.

- The college and its units use scholarship and research to stimulate institutional and educational improvements.
- b. The college demonstrates acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.**
- The college integrates general education into all of its degree programs through curricular and experiential offerings intentionally created to develop the attitudes and skills requisite for a life of learning in a diverse society.
  - The college regularly reviews the relationship between its mission and values and the effectiveness of its general education.
  - The college demonstrates linkages between curricular and co-curricular activities that support inquiry, practice, creativity, and social responsibility.
  - Learning outcomes demonstrate that graduates have achieved a breadth of knowledge and skills and the capacity to exercise intellectual inquiry.
  - Learning outcomes demonstrate effective preparation for continued learning.
- c. The college assesses usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.**
- Regular academic program reviews include attention to currency and relevance of courses and programs.
  - In keeping with the college's mission, learning goals and outcomes include skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce.
  - Learning outcomes document that graduates have gained the skills and knowledge they need to function in diverse local, national, and global societies.
  - Curricular evaluation involves alumni, employers, and other external constituents who understand the relationships among the courses of study, the currency of the curriculum, and the utility of the knowledge and skills gained.
  - The college supports creation and use of scholarship by students in keeping with its mission.
  - Faculty expect students to master the knowledge and skills necessary for independent learning in programs of applied practice.
  - The college provides curricular and co-curricular opportunities that promote social responsibility.
- d. The college provides support to ensure faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.**
- The college's academic and student support programs contribute to the development of student skills and attitudes fundamental to responsible use of knowledge.
  - The college follows explicit policies and procedures to ensure ethical conduct in its research and instructional activities.
  - The college encourages curricular and co-curricular activities that relate responsible use of knowledge to practicing social responsibility.
  - The college provides effective oversight and support services to ensure the integrity of research and practice conducted by its faculty and students.

The college creates, disseminates, and enforces clear policies on practices involving intellectual property rights.

***The Range of Potential Sources of Documentation for Criterion 4 (Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge) Is Suggested by the Following:***

- » Documentation of periodic identification of changing student needs
- » Descriptions of exit placement activities and planning sessions
- » Plans for evaluation and improvement of instructional equipment
- » Written descriptions of processes for developing, evaluating, and revising programs
- » Copies of program review results for vocational-technical programs
- » Labor market surveys
- » Minutes of advisory committees indicating involvement of alumni, employers, and other external constituents in curricular evaluation

- » Results of evaluation efforts for arts and sciences programs and components of programs
- » Written copy of college's Quality Faculty Plan (QFP), QFP monitoring procedures, and samples of approved individual faculty development plans
- » Samples of notices and advertisements describing professional development opportunities on and off campus

### **Criterion 5. Engagement and Service**

*As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.*

#### **a. The college learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.**

- The college's commitments are shaped by its mission and its capacity to support those commitments.
- The college practices periodic environmental scanning to understand the changing needs of its constituencies and their communities.
- The college demonstrates attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves.
- The college's outreach programs respond to identified community needs.
- In responding to external constituencies, the college is well-served by programs such as continuing education, outreach, customized training, and extension services.

#### **b. The college has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.**

The college's structures and processes enable effective connections with its communities.

The college's co-curricular activities engage students, staff, administrators, and faculty with external communities.

The college's educational programs connect students with external communities.

The college's resources—physical, financial, and human—support effective programs of engagement and service.

Planning processes project ongoing engagement and service.

#### **c. The college demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.**

- Collaborative ventures exist with other higher learning organizations and education sectors (e.g., K-12 partnerships, articulation arrangements, 2+2 programs).
- The college's transfer policies and practices create an environment supportive of the mobility of learners.
- Community leaders testify to the usefulness of the college's programs of engagement.
- The college's programs of engagement give evidence of building effective bridges among diverse communities.
- The college participates in partnerships focused on shared educational, economic, and social goals.
- The college's partnerships and contractual arrangements uphold the college's integrity.

#### **d. Internal and external constituencies value services the college provides.**

- The college's evaluation of services involves the constituencies served.
- Service programs and student, faculty, and staff volunteer activities are well-received by the communities served.
- The college's economic and workforce development activities are sought after and valued by civic and business leaders.
- External constituents participate in the college's activities and cocurricular programs open to the public.
- The college's facilities are available to and used by the community.
- The college provides programs to meet the continuing education needs of licensed professionals in its community.

***The Range of Potential Sources of Documentation for Criterion 5 (Service and Engagement) Is Suggested by the Following:***

- » 260E, 260F, 260G agreements
- » Articulation agreements and transfer statistics
- » Assessments of community needs]
- » Documents describing community partnerships and mutual responsibilities
- » Data on numbers and characteristics of student enrollment in departments, programs, and courses, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability
- » Calendar of events scheduled (speakers, workshops, etc.)
- » Descriptions and availability of facilities for activities for students, staff, and community
- » Evaluation of effectiveness of services
- » Listing and schedules of extracurricular activities, clubs, and student organizations
- » Results of periodic environmental scanning of college's service area
- » Documents showing college's commitment to articulation policies that are predictable in transferring credit for completed coursework, flexible to serve diverse student needs, and disseminated frequently to students, faculty, and administrators

**Iowa Standards**

To be granted accreditation by the state board of education, an Iowa community college must also meet four additional standards, pertaining to minimum standards for faculty; faculty load; students with special needs; and vocational education evaluation.

**1. Minimum standards for faculty**

Community college-employed instructors teaching full-time in career and technical education and arts and sciences shall meet minimum standards. Standards shall at a minimum require that full-time community college instructors meet the following requirements:

Instructors in the subject area of ***career and technical education*** shall be registered, certified, or licensed in the occupational area in which the state requires registration, certification, or licensure, and shall hold the appropriate registration, certificate, or license for the occupational area in which the instructor is teaching, and shall meet either of the following qualifications:

A baccalaureate or graduate degree in the area or a related area of study or occupational area in which the instructor is teaching classes.

Special training and at least 6,000 hours of recent and relevant work experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes if the instructor possesses less than a baccalaureate degree.

Instructors in the subject area of ***arts and sciences*** shall meet either of the following qualifications:

Possess a master's degree from a regionally accredited graduate school, and have successfully completed a minimum of 12 credit hours of graduate level courses in each field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes.

Have two or more years of successful experience in a professional field or area in which the instructor is teaching classes and in which post-baccalaureate recognition or professional licensure is necessary for practice, including but not limited to the fields or areas of accounting, engineering, law, law enforcement, and medicine.

Full-time developmental education and adult education instructors may or may not meet minimum requirements depending on their teaching assignments and the relevancy of standards to the courses they are teaching and the transferability of such courses. If instructors are teaching credit courses reported in arts and sciences or career and technical education, it is recommended that these instructors meet the minimum standards described in either paragraph "a" or "b."



## 2. Faculty Load

Teaching loads for full-time faculty at Iowa community college are specified by law, as follows:

- a. The full-time teaching load of an instructor in *arts and sciences* programs shall not exceed a maximum of 16 credit hours per school term or the equivalent. An instructor may also have a teaching assignment outside of the normal school hours; provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment and the total workload does not exceed the equivalent of 18 credit hours within a traditional semester.
- b. The full-time teaching load of an instructor in *career and technical education* programs shall not exceed six hours per day, and an aggregate of 30 hours per week or the equivalent. An instructor may also teach the equivalent of an additional three credit hours provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment. When the teaching assignment includes classroom subjects (nonlaboratory), consideration shall be given to establishing the teaching load more in conformity with that of paragraph "a" of this subrule.

## 3. Persons with Special Needs

Iowa community colleges are required to provide equal access in recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs. Students with special education needs shall receive instruction in the least restrictive environment with access to the full range of program offerings at a college, through, but not limited to, adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment, facilities, career guidance, and counseling services.

## 4. Vocational Education Evaluation

The department of education shall review at least 20 percent of approved vocational education programs within the state annually, to ensure that the programs are:

- a. Compatible with educational reform efforts.
- b. Capable of responding to technological change and innovation.
- c. Meeting educational needs of the students and employment community including students with disabilities, both male and female students, from diverse racial and ethnic groups.
- d. Enabling students enrolled to perform the minimum competencies independently.
- e. Articulated/integrated with the total school curriculum.
- f. Enabling students with a secondary vocational background to pursue other educational interests in a postsecondary setting, if desired.
- g. Availing students with support services and eliminating access barriers to education and employment for both traditional and nontraditional students, men and women, persons from diverse racial and ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities.

A statewide evaluation system utilizing multiple indicators will encompass the requirements of both state and federal vocational education legislation.

### Section 3

#### STATE ACCREDITATION TEAM

##### Team Composition

Evaluation teams will be composed of DE staff, one of whom will be the team leader, and community college personnel. The size of the team will be determined by the size of the institution and the needs of the particular evaluation visit. A process for nomination, selection, and training of team members will be developed and implemented. Team members will receive training in state evaluation procedures. Team members, other than those from the DE, will be compensated for expenses incurred by the college being evaluated and any other technical expertise as needed.

### **Team Selection**

The following criteria will be considered in determining team membership:

- Team members will be selected by the college from a list of potential team members drawn up by the DE.
- Community college personnel should include at least one administrator and one faculty member.
- Members will be selected from individuals who have completed training as accreditation evaluators by the DE or HLC.
- Individuals with HLC expertise will be included on each team, when possible.
- Team may include both members with prior experience on state accreditation teams and team members without prior experience.
- Members will be selected who have interest and expertise in the areas selected by the community college for review.
- Exceptions may be made to the above criteria to accommodate unique community college accreditation needs.

### **Team Leader Responsibilities**

Determining potential team members using criteria listed above under "Team Selection"

- Creating team list and conveying names to the community college contact (usually the accreditation chair) for review with the community college president
- Reviewing the team membership list with the president and the college's accreditation chair by phone
- Contacting and confirming each selected team member
- Reviewing the team membership list with Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation administration

### **Team Responsibilities**

The primary responsibility of the accreditation team is to determine whether the institution meets the requirements set forth in the Iowa Administrative Code for state accreditation of community colleges.

Individual team member responsibilities are to:

- Read all materials before the visit, determine individual questions and concerns, and identify potential areas of strength, particularly those in the team member's assigned area of responsibility
- Meet with fellow team members at the beginning of the visit to identify questions, concerns, and potential strengths for team investigation and to discuss areas of responsibility
- Investigate assigned areas during the visit to determine answers to identified questions and concerns and to gain additional information on strengths. Criterion evaluation forms are included in Appendix 6 for the convenience of team members
- Meet with the team during the visit to discuss individual views regarding assigned areas.
- Participate in final on-site team meeting to reach consensus regarding accreditation report
- Attend exit interview
- Write final report with specific supporting documentation for all criteria assigned
- Write individual assignment for the team report and submit to the team leader by the end of the accreditation visit
- Complete an accreditation evaluation form. (See Appendix 7)
- Review final accreditation report prior to mailing to institution visited

Team members' time during the visit will also include the following:

- Review of resource room materials
- Schedule blocks of time to conduct interviews and collect data on assigned criteria. The validity of the final team report depends upon quality research and inquiry by each team member
- Independent time for review of findings and preliminary report writing
- Introductory team meeting with community college personnel
- Prearranged group meetings regarding identified topics
- Prearranged individual team member meeting with individual or small group
- Meetings scheduled during the visit by team members
- Team meetings



Team members will be expected to demonstrate professionalism in conduct throughout the visit. All discussions held in team meetings are considered confidential and are not to be shared with anyone outside the team, except as mutually agreed upon. Team members are permitted to share opinions and information with community college personnel as the site visit takes place. However, team members are not permitted to offer advice that may be construed as team recommendations or requirements. Recommendations or requirements will be the collective decision of the team and will be made through the formal report process. There is a difference between opinion and advice, and the DE will rely on the professionalism of team members to make these distinctions.

The final accreditation report, including recommendations for institutional improvement, is written by the team chair. The final report is distributed in draft form to team members for corrections and comments before general distribution.

### **Planning Checklist for the Accreditation Team Leader**

The team leader is to:

- Make hotel reservations
- Reserve a team meeting room at the hotel, if possible
- Team meetings
- Contact the institution to provide a meeting room for the team on campus
- Arrange for secretarial assistance or word processing equipment, if possible
- Arrange for meetings during the visit with:
  - Members of the college's governing board
  - Representatives of other related agencies as appropriate
  - Faculty representatives
  - Student representatives
  - Alumni and community leaders
- Announce the visit and the availability of the team to confer with institutional personnel during "open time"
- Make certain that all key college personnel are available during the visit
- Confirm that material needed by the team during its visit has been placed in the team's meeting room on campus
- Mail all institutional materials to the team two months before the visit.
- The team chair should contact team members to:
  - Welcome any new evaluators and offer to provide additional assistance
  - Notify team members of hotel and other arrangements
  - Schedule the first team meeting
  - Make assignments of areas of special responsibility, including report writing
  - Direct team members to study the *Guide for State Accreditation of Iowa Community Colleges* and bring the *Guide* with them on the site visit

### **Visited Institution Responsibilities**

- Assign contact person
- Review proposed membership of accreditation team
- Prepare documentation for review by accreditation team
- Arrange on-site meetings of accreditation team members and college personnel

### **Timeline for Accreditation Site Visits**

Traditionally the accreditation site visit is three days in length, though the length of the visit depends upon several factors, including size of the community college, number of campus sites to be visited by the team, and number of team members. A sample timeline of key steps in planning, conducting, and reporting on the accreditation site visit appears in Appendix 3.

### **Team Report**

The team leader prepares the team report and supervises the process of submitting the report to the State Board of Education, as follows:

- A draft of the team report is reviewed by team members to confirm the team's findings.

- Having been reviewed by the accreditation team, the draft report is checked by the college for factual accuracy.
- The final draft of the accreditation report is submitted to the Administrator, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation, with the team leader's recommendation regarding reaffirmation of the college's accreditation status.
- With the Division Administrator's approval, the accreditation report is submitted to the Director of the Iowa Department of Education for action by the State Board.

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**Section 4: Appendices**

**Appendix 1. Definitions Related to Accreditation**

**Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).** The Higher Learning Commission's approach to accreditation based on continuous quality improvement principles

**Access.** The right of all individuals to educational opportunities, regardless of obstacles that may impede their success, including but not limited to, geographic; financial; academic; physical; social; economic; and other institutional barriers. Access preserves and clarifies the concept of the "open door" upon which community colleges were founded, but places the responsibility to provide educational opportunities that enable students to succeed on the community college and on the State of Iowa

**Accreditation.** The approval process by which the Iowa State Board of Education confirms that criteria established have been met by a community college

**Achievement.** The measurable progress made by an individual in meeting his/her educational objective(s) and those established by the community college

**Administration.** Management and supervisory activities that support services necessary for the direction and control of an institution

**Approval.** A formal action by the State Board to grant a community college the authority to continue to carry out functions

**Articulation.** The process of mutually agreeing upon courses and programs earned at a sending institution, which are transferable between secondary or postsecondary institutions for credit or advanced placement at a receiving institution

**AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program).** The Higher Learning Commission's approach to accreditation based on continuous quality improvement principles

**Assessment.** Any practice or procedure used in evaluating individuals, programs, or functions

**Community.** A group of individuals with common interests. Within the context of a community college, this refers to any "community," from the classroom to the entire college service area

**Constituent.** An individual residing within a community college's service area

**Core Components.** Subcategories of the criteria for accreditation that are reviewed in order to determine whether an organization meets the criteria [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Criteria for Accreditation.** The requirements necessary for accreditation as established by the Iowa State Board of Education. The framework for determining an organization's accreditation [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Developmental Education.** A series of instructional and support services designed to provide opportunities for each student who requires assistance to successfully meet a career goal through postsecondary education. Developmental education assumes that each student has the ability to succeed in his or her program of choice, given the needed support and/or assistance

**Diversity.** The wide range of individual differences (such as race, ethnicity, beliefs, values, customs, social, economic background, skills, culture, ability, age, and gender) present in a community

**Examples of Evidence.** Illustrative examples of the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a core component of a criterion for accreditation [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Focus Visit.** A team visit that occurs between regularly scheduled accreditation site visits to examine specific operations of the college [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Function.** Those programs, activities, and services that comprise all aspects of a college relevant to fulfilling its mission

**General Education.** That portion of an instructional program designed to impart common knowledge, promote intellectual inquiry, and stimulate the examination of different perspectives

**Governance.** The management of a college's human, financial, and other resources

**Graduate.** A person who has fulfilled all the requirements of a program and has earned a certificate, diploma, or degree

**Higher Learning Commission (HLC).** The commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits degree-granting higher education organizations [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Institutional Effectiveness.** The level at which a community college meets the needs of its constituents

**Learning Resources.** Library, media, and information services that include a range of information sources, associated equipment, and services accessible to students, staff, and the community

**PEAQ (Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality).** The traditional program for maintaining accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Program.** Instructional program; a grouping of courses leading to a degree, diploma or certificate

**Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ).** The traditional program for maintaining accreditation with The Higher Learning Commission [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Self-Study Process.** A formal, comprehensive, institution-wide process of self-examination in preparation for a scheduled comprehensive evaluation [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Self-Study Report.** A document prepared by an organization that describes the process used to conduct the self-study, evaluates what it learned, and proposes what it intends to do with the knowledge. The report functions as the formal argument that the organization satisfies the criteria for accreditation [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Site Visit.** A team visit to a college campus

**Standards.** In the context of state accreditation, "standards " refers to aspects of college operations that are prescribed by Iowa Code.

**Team Report.** Report that documents the findings and recommendation of an accreditation team [HLC, *Handbook of accreditation*, 2005]

**Under-prepared.** Lacking the background and experiences that would provide a student or potential student with the basic skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education

## Appendix 2. Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the reason for state accreditation of community colleges?

Iowa legislation created state accreditation of community colleges to ensure the public its tax-supported educational institutions are operated effectively and efficiently.

### 2. What are the five Higher Learning Commission (HLC) criteria?

*Criterion 1 – Mission and Integrity:* The college operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

*Criterion 2 – Preparing for the Future:* The college's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

*Criterion 3 – Student Learning and Effective Teaching:* The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

*Criterion 4 – Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge:* The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

*Criterion 5 – Engagement and Service:* As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituents and serves them in ways both value.

### 3. Can the community college submit the HLC self-study report for the state accreditation?

Yes. The college may prepare a crosswalk to reference, by page and paragraph, the places within the HLC report where the evidence for the state criteria can be found.

### 4. Will the HLC and state accreditation teams visit at the same time?

The community college has the prerogative to schedule the state accreditation visits whenever they choose within the same year as HLC.

### 5. Should the answer format for all criteria be the same?

No. Particular components of some criteria may be addressed, which can be answered with yes or no. (Either there is a current catalog or there is not a current catalog.) Other responses will be detailed and may include charts, narrative, or a variety of data presented in a way that demonstrates the evidence.

**6. Why are there so few required examples of evidence listed in the HLC and Iowa accreditation criteria?**

Accreditation processes are moving away from the concept of "minimum accreditation standards." Therefore, there are few required examples of evidence, since that might imply that "required" examples of evidence are adequate to meet the criteria. In some cases, items such as the community college catalog and the board policy book are examples of single methods to provide evidence.

**7. Which of the examples of documentation should we use?**

This Guide provides *suggestions* about what types of documentation may be used. The community college has the discretion to gather whatever documentation and/or other sources of evidence it chooses in order to demonstrate that it meets HLC and state criteria.

**8. How are state accreditation team members chosen and trained?**

Community college presidents recommend personnel for state accreditation training. Different teams are selected from this group for each accreditation visit. Each team is designed to meet the needs of the assigned accreditation, with attention given to balancing team member areas of expertise and experience.

**9. Who pays the expenses for the accreditation team?**

The DE pays for their employees. The community college being visited pays for other team members expenses at their standard rate. No reimbursement will be made for expenses unrelated to accreditation activities.

### Appendix 3. Sample Timeline for the Iowa Accreditation Process

(This sample timeline is based on HLC's timeline. The timeline assumes all visits will be scheduled between September and May.)

#### Prior to site visit

12 months prior

- Division administrator designates the DE team leader.
- Team leader discusses scheduled site accreditation visit with college officials.

6 months prior

- College identifies its site visit coordinator and preferred dates for the site visit.
- Team leader visits college to discuss accreditation process, schedules, and specific expectations for the site visit.
- Team leader discusses possible team members with college officials.
- Team leader recruits team members.

3 months prior

- Team leader contacts college's site visit coordinator to make preliminary arrangements for evaluation visit: schedules, facilities, materials to be reviewed, etc.
- Team leader finalizes specific team assignments and sends one complete set of evaluation materials to each member of the accreditation team and to the Bureau Chief, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation at the Iowa Department of Education.

- College's site visit coordinator sends each team member a complete set of accreditation material related to site visit

1 month prior

- Team leader arranges hotel accommodations.
- Team leader contacts institution to finalize details of site visit: Schedule, resource room, lodging, and meal arrangements.

#### During site visit

- Team leader supervises team members' participation in meetings and contribution to the drafting of preliminary accreditation report. Team leader delivers exit presentation.

#### After site visit

1 month

- Team leader receives reports from all team members
- Team leader completes final draft of report and circulates it first to team members and then to the institution and the DE for correction of errors in fact.

2 months

- Team leader finalizes team's report based on comments received
- Team leader submits accreditation report and recommendations to Division Administrator

- Division Administrator forward accreditation report and recommendations to State Board of Education for action

3 months

- Division Administrator notifies college of State Board action

**Appendix 4. Iowa Code 1997: Section 260C.47**

1. The state board of education shall establish an accreditation process for community college programs by July 1, 1997. The process shall be jointly developed and agreed upon by the department of education and the community colleges. The state accreditation process shall be integrated with the accreditation process of the north central association of colleges and schools, including the evaluation cycle, the self-study process, and the criteria for evaluation, which shall incorporate the standards for community colleges developed under section 260C.48; and shall identify and make provision for the needs of the state that are not met by the association's accreditation process. If a joint agreement has not been reached by July 1, 1997, the approval process provided under section 260C.4, subsection 4, shall remain the required accreditation process for community colleges. For the academic year commencing July 1, 1998, and in succeeding school years, the department of education shall use a two-component process for the continued accreditation of community college programs.
  - a. The first component consists of submission of required data by the community colleges and annual monitoring by the department of education of all community colleges for compliance with state program evaluation requirements adopted by the state
  - b. The second component consists of the use of an accreditation team appointed by the director of the department of education, to conduct an evaluation, including an on-site visit of each community college, with a comprehensive evaluation to occur during the same year as the evaluation by the north central association of colleges and schools. The number and composition of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director, but the team shall include members of the department of education staff and community college staff members from community colleges other than the community college that conducts the programs being evaluated for accreditation.
  - c. Rules adopted by the state board shall include provisions for coordination of the accreditation process under this section with activities of accreditation associations, which are designed to avoid duplication in the accreditation process.
2. Prior to a visit to a community college, members of the accreditation team shall have access to the program audit report filed with the department for that community college. After a visit to a community college, the accreditation team shall determine whether the accreditation standards for a program have been met and shall make a report to the director and the state board, together with a recommendation as to whether the program of the community college should remain accredited. The accreditation team shall report strengths and weaknesses, if any, for each program standard and shall advise the community college of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance strengths and improve areas of weakness. A community college may respond to the accreditation team's report.
3. The state board shall determine whether a program of a community college shall remain accredited. If the state board determines that a program of a community college does not meet accreditation standards, the director of the department of education, in cooperation with the board of directors of the community college, shall establish a plan prescribing the procedures that must be taken to correct deficiencies in meeting the program standards, and shall establish a deadline date for correction of the deficiencies. The deadline for correction of deficiencies under a plan shall be no later than June 30 of the year following the on-site visit of the accreditation team. The plan is subject to approval of the state board. Plans shall include components which address meeting program deficiencies, sharing or merger options, discontinuance of specific programs or courses of study, and any other options proposed by the state board or the accreditation team to allow the college to meet the program standards.
4. During the time specified in the plan for its implementation, the community college program remains accredited. The accreditation team shall revisit the community college and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the standards for the program have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board. The state board shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies in the program have been corrected.
5. If the deficiencies have not been corrected in a program of a community college, the community college board shall take one of the following actions within sixty days from removal of accreditation:
  - a. Merge the deficient program or programs with a program or programs from another accredited community college.
  - b. Contract with another educational institution for purposes of program delivery at the community college.



- c. Discontinue the program or programs, which have been identified as deficient.
6. The director of the department of education shall give a community college, which has a program, which fails to meet accreditation standards, at least one year's notice prior to removal of accreditation of the program. The notice shall be given by certified mail or restricted certified mail addressed to the superintendent of the community college and shall specify the reasons for removal of accreditation of the program. The notice shall also be sent by ordinary mail to each member of the board of directors of the community college. Any good faith error or failure to comply with the notice requirements shall not affect the validity of any action by the director. If, during the year, the community college remedies the reasons for removal of accreditation of the program and satisfies the director that the community college will comply with the accreditation standards for that program in the future, the director shall continue the accreditation of the program of the community college and shall transmit notice of the action to the community college by certified mail or restricted certified mail.
7. The action of the director to remove a community college's accreditation of the program may be appealed to the state board. At the hearing, the community college may be represented by counsel and may present evidence. The state board may provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported. If requested by the community college at least ten days before the hearing, the state board shall provide for the hearing to be recorded or reported at the expense of the community college, using any reasonable method specified by the community college. Within ten days after the hearing, the state board shall render a written decision, and shall affirm, modify, or vacate the action or proposed action to remove the college's accreditation of the program. Action by the state board is final agency action for purposes of chapter 17A.

#### **Iowa Administrative Rules: Proposed chapter 24**

##### **281—24.1 (260C) Form and content of notice of intent.**

##### **281—24.2(260C) Accreditation.**

**24.2(1) Purpose.** The purpose of accreditation of Iowa's community colleges is to confirm that each college is meeting, to the greatest extent possible, educational opportunities and services, when applicable, but not be limited to:

- a. The first two years of college work including pre-professional education.
- b. Vocational and technical training.
- c. Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers.
- d. Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age.
- e. Programs for all students of high school age, who may best serve themselves by enrolling for vocational and technical training, while also enrolled in a local high school, public or private.
- f. Programs for students of high school age to provide advanced college placement courses not taught at a student's high school while the student is also enrolled in the high school.
- g. Student personnel services.
- h. Community services.
- i. Vocational education for persons who have academic, socioeconomic, or other disabilities which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs.
- j. Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens.
- k. Vocational and technical training for persons who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school.
- l. Developmental education for persons who are academically or personally under-prepared to succeed in their program of study, as set forth in Iowa Code section 260C.1.

**24.2(2) Scope.** Each community college is subject to accreditation by the state board of education, as provided in Iowa Code section 260C.47. The state board of education shall grant accreditation if a community college meets the standards established in this chapter.

**24.2(3) Accreditation components.** In order to be accredited by the state board of education and maintain accreditation status, a community college must meet the accreditation criteria of the Higher Learning Commission and additional state standards described below.

**24.2(3)(a)** The Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria are as follows:

1. *Mission and Integrity Do we need to include the defining statement for each criterion????*

- (a) The college's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the college's commitments.
- (b) In its mission documents, the college recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- (c) Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the college.
- (d) The college's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the college to fulfill its mission.
- (e) The college upholds and protects its integrity.

2. *Preparing for the Future*

- (a) The college realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
- (b) The college's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
- (c) The college's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
- (d) All levels of planning align with the college's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

3. *Student Learning and Effective Teaching*

- (a) The college's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
- (b) The college values and supports effective teaching.
- (c) The college creates effective learning environments.
- (d) The college's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

4. *Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge*

- (a) The college demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
- (b) The college demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
- (c) The college assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
- (d) The college provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

5. *Engagement and Service*

- (a) The college learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
- (b) The college has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
- (c) The college demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
- (d) Internal and external constituencies value the services the college provides.

**24.2(3)(b)** To be granted accreditation by the state board of education, an Iowa community college must also meet four additional standards, pertaining to minimum standards for faculty; faculty load; special needs; and vocational education evaluation, as follows:

**24.2(3)(b)(1) Minimum standards.** Community college-employed instructors teaching full-time in career and technical education and arts and sciences shall meet minimum standards. In accordance with 2002 Iowa Acts, chapter 1047, section 8, standards shall at a minimum require that full-time community college instructors meet the following requirements:

- a. Instructors in the subject area of career and technical education shall be registered, certified, or licensed in the occupational area in which the state requires registration, certification, or licensure, and shall hold the appropriate registration, certificate, or license for the occupational area in which the instructor is teaching, and shall meet either of the following qualifications:
  - (1) A baccalaureate or graduate degree in the area or a related area of study or occupational area in which the instructor is teaching classes.



- (2) Special training and at least 6,000 hours of recent and relevant work experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes if the instructor possesses less than a baccalaureate degree.
- b. Instructors in the subject area of arts and sciences shall meet either of the following qualifications:
- (1) Possess a master's degree from a regionally accredited graduate school, and have successfully completed a minimum of 12 credit hours of graduate level courses in each field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes.
  - (2) Have two or more years of successful experience in a professional field or area in which the instructor is teaching classes and in which post-baccalaureate recognition or professional licensure is necessary for practice, including but not limited to the fields or areas of accounting, engineering, law, law enforcement, and medicine.
- c. Full-time developmental education and adult education instructors may or may not meet minimum requirements depending on their teaching assignments and the relevancy of standards to the courses they are teaching and the transferability of such courses. If instructors are teaching credit courses reported in arts and sciences or career and technical education, it is recommended that these instructors meet minimum standards set forth in subrule 21.3(1), paragraph "a" or "b."

**24.2(3)(b)(2) Definitions.** For purposes of interpreting this rule, the following definitions shall apply:

*"Field of instruction."* The determination of what constitutes each field of instruction should be based on accepted practices of regionally accredited two- and four-year institutions of higher education.

*"Full-time instructor."* An instructor is considered to be full-time if the community college board of directors designates the instructor as full-time. Consideration of determining full-time status shall be based on local board approved contracts.

*"Instructors meeting minimum requirements."* A community college instructor meeting the minimum requirements of 2002 Iowa Acts, chapter 1047, section 8, is a full-time instructor teaching college credit courses. Credit courses should meet requirements as specified in rule 281—21.2(260C), and meet program requirements for college parallel, career and technical education, and career-option programs as specified in rule 281—21.4(260C) and Iowa Code chapter 260C.

*"Minimum of 12 graduate hours."* Full-time arts and sciences instructors must possess a master's degree and complete a minimum of 12 graduate hours in their field of instruction. The 12 graduate hours may be within the master's degree requirements or independent of the master's degree.

*"Relevant work experience."* An hour of recent and relevant work experience is equal to 60 minutes. The community college will determine what constitutes recent and relevant work experience that relates to the instructor's occupational and teaching area. The college should maintain documentation of the instructor's educational and work experience.

**24.2(3)(b)(3) Faculty load.**

a. *College parallel.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in college parallel programs shall not exceed a maximum of 16 credit hours per school term or the equivalent. An instructor may also have a teaching assignment outside of the normal school hours; provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment and the total workload does not exceed the equivalent of 18 credit hours within a traditional semester.

b. *Career and Technical education.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in career education programs shall not exceed six hours per day, and an aggregate of 30 hours per week or the equivalent. An instructor may also teach the equivalent of an additional three credit hours provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment. When the teaching assignment includes classroom subjects (nonlaboratory), consideration shall be given to establishing the teaching load more in conformity with that of paragraph "a" of this subrule.

**24.2(3)(b)(4) Special needs.** Standards developed shall include provisions requiring equal access in recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with special education needs. The provisions shall include a requirement that students with special education needs shall receive instruction in the least restrictive environment with access to the full range of program offerings at a college, through, but not limited to, adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment, facilities, career guidance, and counseling services.

**24.2(3)(b)(5) Statewide vocational education evaluation.** The department of education shall review at least 20 percent of approved vocational education programs within the state annually, to ensure that the programs are:

- a. Compatible with educational reform efforts.
- b. Capable of responding to technological change and innovation.
- c. Meeting educational needs of the students and employment community including students with disabilities, both male and female students, from diverse racial and ethnic groups.
- d. Enabling students enrolled to perform the minimum competencies independently.
- e. Articulated/integrated with the total school curriculum.
- f. Enabling students with a secondary vocational background to pursue other educational interests in a postsecondary setting, if desired.
- g. Availing students with support services and eliminating access barriers to education and employment for both traditional and nontraditional students, men and women, persons from diverse racial and ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities.

Evaluation activities shall include both secondary and postsecondary vocational education instructional programs. A statewide evaluation system utilizing multiple indicators will encompass the requirements of both state and federal vocational education legislation.

### **281—24.3 (260C) Community College Accreditation Process.**

**24.3(1) Components.** The community college accreditation process shall include the following components:

- a. Each community college shall submit information on an annual basis by the department of education for compliance with program evaluation requirements adopted by the state board of education.
- b. The department of education shall conduct an on-site accreditation evaluation of each community college during the same year as the evaluation by the Higher Learning Commission.

**24.3(2) Accreditation team.** The size and composition of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director, but the team shall include members of the department of education staff and staff members from community colleges other than the community college being evaluated for accreditation, and any other technical experts as needed.

**24.3(3) Accreditation team action.** After a visit to a community college, the accreditation team shall evaluate whether the accreditation standards have been met and shall make a report to the director and the state board of education, together with a recommendation as to whether the community college should remain accredited. The accreditation team shall report strengths and opportunities for improvement, if any, for each standard and shall advise the community college of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance strengths and address areas for improvement. A community college may respond to the accreditation team's report.

**24.3(4) State board of education consideration of accreditation.** The state board of education shall determine whether a community college shall remain accredited. Approval of a community college by the state board of education shall be based on the recommendation of the director of the department of education after study of the factual and evaluative evidence on record pursuant to the standards described in this chapter, and based upon the timely submission of information required by the department of education in a format provided by the department of education. With the approval of the director of the Iowa department of education, a focus visit may be conducted if the situation at a particular college warrants such a visit.

- a. **Accreditation granted.** Continuation of accreditation, if granted, shall be for a term consistent with the term of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission; however, approval for a lesser term may be granted by the state board of education if it determines conditions so warrant.
- b. **Accreditation denied or conditional accreditation.** If the state board of education denies accreditation or grants conditional accreditation, the director of the department of education, in cooperation with the board of directors of the community college, shall establish a plan prescribing the procedures that must be taken to correct deficiencies in meeting the standards and shall establish a deadline for correction of the deficiencies. The plan is subject to approval of the state board of education. Plans shall include components which address correcting deficiencies, sharing or merger options, discontinuance of specific programs or courses of study, and any other options proposed by the state board of education or the accreditation team to allow the college to meet the standards.

- c. Implementation of plan.* During the time specified in the plan for its implementation, the community college remains accredited. The accreditation team shall revisit the community college and shall evaluate whether the deficiencies in the standards have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board of education. The state board of education shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies have been corrected.
- d. Removal of accreditation.* The director shall give a community college which fails to meet accreditation standards at least one year's notice prior to removal of accreditation. The notice shall be given by certified mail or restricted certified mail addressed to the chief executive officer of the community college and shall specify the reasons for removal of accreditation. The notice shall also be sent to each member of the board of directors of the community college. If, during the year, the community college remedies the reasons for removal of accreditation and satisfies the director that the community college will comply with the accreditation standards in the future, the director shall continue the accreditation and shall transmit notice of the action to the community college by certified mail or restricted certified mail.
- e. Failure to correct deficiencies.* If the deficiencies have not been corrected in a program of a community college, the community college board shall take one of the following actions within 60 days from removal of accreditation:
- (1) Merge the deficient program or programs with a program or programs from another accredited community college.
  - (2) Contract with another educational institution for purposes of program delivery at the community college.
  - (3) Discontinue the program or programs which have been identified as deficient.
- f. Appeal process provided.* The action of the director to remove a community college's accreditation may be appealed to the state board of education as provided in Iowa Code subsection 260C.47(7).

### Appendix 5. Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)

In order to expedite application of data gathered in the course of AQIP activity to HLC's five accreditation criteria, the Commission issued the following crosswalk to indicate some of the possible alignments between AQIP categories and HLC criteria.

The Commission's Criteria for Accreditation	AQIP Category*								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Criterion One: Mission and Integrity.</b> The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.	X	X	X		X			X	
<b>Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future</b> The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.				X		X	X	X	X
<b>Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching</b> The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.	X		X		X	X	X		
<b>Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discover, and Application of Knowledge</b> The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.	X	X	X	X		X			
<b>Criterion Five: Engagement and Service</b> As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.		X		X	X		X		X

\*Key to the nine AQIP categories:

- Helping Students Learn
- Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives
- Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs
- Valuing People
- Leading and Communicating
- Supporting Institutional Operations
- Measuring Effectiveness
- Planning Continuous Improvement
- Building Collaborative Relationships

The following table, which is based on information drawn from AQIP publications, provides examples of the extent to which AQIP activities projects [col. 3] lend themselves to evaluation in the context of Iowa's accreditation criteria and core components. The table includes AQIP categories [col. 1] and alignments of Iowa criteria and core components [col. 5], along with their respective identification numbers [cols. 2 and 4]. All text copyright Higher Learning Commission.

[1] AQIP category	[2] #	[3] Focus of potential AQIP action projects	[4] #	[5] Iowa accreditation criterion and core component
Helping Students Learn	1	Strengthening educational effectiveness, assessment, and evaluation	3a	The college's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
Helping Students Learn	1	Measuring, analyzing, observing, tracking, recording, and grading student academic achievement, in individual courses, in degree programs, and in co-curricular contexts for institutional improvement	3a	The college's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
Helping Students Learn	1	Delivering instruction and encouraging and promoting academic and other forms of student development, in and out of the classroom	3c	The college creates effective learning environments.
Helping Students Learn	1	Developing, staffing, delivering, supporting, scheduling, evaluating, ordering, retiring, and revising credit courses, continuing education and special instructional activities	4c	The college assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	3	Establishing, articulating, publicizing, maintaining, and reviewing targets for student performance (learning, behaviors, values, activities, etc.)	3a	The college's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	3	Forming and using advisory committees	5a	The college learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	3	Communicating to the public	5b	The college has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	3	Maintaining useful relationships with students, former students, and other stakeholders	5c	The college demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for services.
Valuing People	4	Designing, organizing, and managing work and jobs to promote individual initiative, cooperation, collaboration, innovation, and flexibility while keeping current with educational and instructional needs	1d	The college's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the college to fulfill its mission.

[1] AQIP category	[2] #	[3] Focus of potential AQIP action projects	[4] #	[5] Iowa accreditation criterion and core component
Valuing People	4	Identifying, recruiting, selecting, hiring, orienting, training, developing, assigning, evaluating, retaining, replacing, and dismissing academic staff, support staff, administrative staff, volunteers, interns, etc.	3c	The college creates effective learning environments.
Leading and Communicating	5	Communicating mission, philosophy, values, and objectives to all members of the institution, and for making certain those values underlie all decisions	1a	The college's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the college's commitments.
Supporting Institutional Operations	6	Providing institutional support services (e.g., accounting, maintenance, purchasing, risk management)	2b	The college's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
Supporting Institutional Operations	6	Establishing, maintaining, and improving administrative institutional support programs	3c	The college creates effective learning environments.
Measuring Effectiveness	7	Examining all processes related to the information it does or might collect or use	2c	The college's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
Measuring Effectiveness	7	Gathering, maintaining, and making available a variety of information it collects to those who need it, including data on students and other stakeholder groups; data on institutional programs, academic and other; data on the performance of institutional operations and processes; and information concerning students, stakeholder groups, programs, and performance in comparable institutions	2c	The college's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
Measuring Effectiveness	7	Selecting, managing, and using information and data to support overall institution goals, with strong emphasis on action plans and performance improvement	2c	The college's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
Planning Continuous Improvement	8	Establishing operational plans and performance targets for academic programs, academic support programs, and institutional support programs	2a	The college realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
Building Collaborative Relationships	9	Promoting, monitoring, and evaluating internal responsiveness, cooperation, and collaboration	5a	The college learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
Building Collaborative Relationships	9	Maintaining contact with feeder and receiver institutions and schools to ensure common understanding of the needs of transfer students	5b	The college has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.

**Appendix 6. Criterion Evaluation Forms**

<b>1. MISSION AND INTEGRITY</b>	Needs Improvement	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
1a. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.			
1b. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.			
1c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.			
1d. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.			
1e. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.			

√ = consideration

√√ = serious consideration

1) Strengths

2) Opportunities for Improvement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

**Criterion Evaluation Forms (continued)**

<b>2. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>
2a. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.			
2b. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.			
2c. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.			
2d. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.			

√ = consideration

√√ = serious consideration

1) Strengths

2) Opportunities for Improvement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_



**Criterion Evaluation Forms (continued)**

<b>3. STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>
3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.			
3b. The organization values and supports effective teaching.			
3c. The organization creates effective learning environments.			
3d. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.			

√ = consideration

√√ = serious consideration

1) Strengths

2) Opportunities for Improvement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

**Criterion Evaluation Forms (continued)**

<b>4. ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE</b>	Needs Improvement	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
4a. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.			
4b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.			
4c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.			
4d. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.			

√ = consideration

√√ = serious consideration

1) Strengths

2) Opportunities for Improvement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

**Criterion Evaluation Forms (continued)**

<b>5. ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>
5a. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.			
5b. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.			
5c. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.			
5d. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.			

√ = consideration

√√ = serious consideration

1) Strengths

2) Opportunities for Improvement

Date \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 7. Accreditation Evaluation Form

The state accreditation process for Iowa community colleges has been developed through collaborative activities between community college and Iowa Department of Education personnel. In an effort to continue that interaction and to continuously address improving the process, we welcome your suggestions for improvement based on your experience during this accreditation visit. You may email your comments or write them on this sheet and return it to the accreditation team chair.

Community college visited \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your role in the accreditation visit: (Team member, college faculty, college administration, etc.)

Problems with the process and/or visit that need to be addressed. (Please include possible solutions.)

Strengths of the accreditation process

Signature (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Your signature indicates that you would be willing to assist the Department of Education by discussing your recommendations as part of an accreditation improvement process.)

## APPENDIX G. IOWA ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

### EDUCATION DEPARTMENT [281] Notice of Intended Action

Pursuant to the authority of Iowa Code section 256.7(5), the State Board of Education hereby adopts **new** Chapter 24, "Community College Accreditation," Iowa Administrative Code.

Accreditation rules presently are a part of 281 Iowa Administrative Code 21, and have been in place for more than 10 years. In that time, continuous quality improvement (CQI) has become the key principle in evaluating academic programming and other aspects of community college operations. The proposed revisions in the rules will facilitate evaluation of the colleges' institutional effectiveness in a framework of CQI standards and benchmarks. Adoption of new chapter 24 will create a discrete set of regulations for accreditation, much as 281 Iowa Administrative Code 12 does for the K-12 accreditation process. The new chapter also aligns the state accreditation process more with the required regional accreditation process conducted by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

An agency-wide waiver provision is provided for in 281 Iowa Administrative Code 4.

Interested individuals may make written comments on the proposed amendments on or before June 28, 2006, at 4:30 p.m. Comments on the proposed amendments should be directed to Beverly Bunker, Community College Bureau, Iowa Department of Education, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Grimes State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146; telephone: (515)281-3866; E-mail to: beverly.bunker@iowa.gov or fax to (515) 281-6544.

A public hearing will be held on June 29, 2006, 1:00-3:30 pm, at the State Board Room, Grimes State Office Building, East 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa, at which time persons may present their views either orally or in writing. Any persons who intend to attend the public hearing and have special requirements such as those related to hearing or mobility impairments should contact and advise the Department of Education of their specific needs by calling (515) 281-3125.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code chapter 260C.

A fiscal impact summary prepared by the Legislative Services Agency pursuant to Iowa Code section 17A.4(3) will be available at <http://www.legis.state.ia.us/IAC.html> or at (515) 281-5279 prior to the Administrative Rules Review Committee's review of this rule making.

The following amendments are proposed.

Item 1. Adopt the following **new** Chapter 24, Community College Accreditation:

#### **281—24.1(260C) Accreditation.**

**281—24.1(260C) Purpose.** The purpose of accreditation of Iowa's community colleges is to confirm that each college is meeting, to the greatest extent possible, educational opportunities and services, when applicable, but not be limited to:

- (1) The first two years of college work including pre-professional education.
- (2) Vocational and technical training.
- (3) Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers.
- (4) Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age.
- (5) Programs for all students of high school age, who may best serve themselves by enrolling for vocational and technical training, while also enrolled in a local high school, public or private.
- (6) Programs for students of high school age to provide advanced college placement courses not taught at a student's high school while the student is also enrolled in the high school.
- (7) Student personnel services.
- (8) Community services.
- (9) Vocational education for persons who have academic, socioeconomic, or other disabilities which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs.
- (10) Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens.
- (11) Vocational and technical training for persons who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school.

(12) Developmental education for persons who are academically or personally under-prepared to succeed in their program of study, as set forth in section 260C.1.

**281—24.2(260C) Scope.** Each community college is subject to accreditation by the state board of education, as provided in section 260C.47. The state board of education shall grant accreditation if a community college meets the standards established in this chapter.

**281—24.3(260C) Accreditation components.** In order to be accredited by the state board of education and maintain accreditation status, a community college must meet the accreditation criteria of the Higher Learning Commission and additional state standards described below.

**281—24.4(260C)** The Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria are as follows:

- (1) Mission and Integrity
  - a. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
  - b. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
  - c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
  - d. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
  - e. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.
- (2) Preparing for the Future
  - a. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
  - b. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.
  - c. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.
  - d. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.
- (3) Student Learning and Effective Teaching
  - a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.
  - b. The organization values and supports effective teaching.
  - c. The organization creates effective learning environments.
  - d. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.
- (4) Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge
  - a. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.
  - b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.
  - c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.
  - d. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.
- (5) Engagement and Service
  - a. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
  - b. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
  - c. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
  - d. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.

**281—24.5(260C)** To be granted accreditation by the state board of education, an Iowa community college must also meet four additional standards, pertaining to minimum standards for faculty; faculty load; special needs; and vocational education evaluation. Community college-employed instructors teaching full-time in career and technical education and arts and sciences shall meet minimum standards. In accordance with section 260C.48,

subsection 1, standards shall at a minimum require that full-time community college instructors meet the following requirements:

- (1) Instructors in the subject area of career and technical education shall be registered, certified, or licensed in the occupational area in which the state requires registration, certification, or licensure, and shall hold the appropriate registration, certificate, or license for the occupational area in which the instructor is teaching, and shall meet either of the following qualifications:
  - a. A baccalaureate or graduate degree in the area or a related area of study or occupational area in which the instructor is teaching classes.
  - b. Special training and at least 6,000 hours of recent and relevant work experience in the occupational area or related occupational area in which the instructor teaches classes if the instructor possesses less than a baccalaureate degree.
- (2) Instructors in the subject area of arts and sciences shall meet either of the following qualifications:
  - a. Possess a master's degree from a regionally accredited graduate school, and have successfully completed a minimum of 12 credit hours of graduate level courses in each field of instruction in which the instructor is teaching classes.
  - b. Have two or more years of successful experience in a professional field or area in which the instructor is teaching classes and in which post-baccalaureate recognition or professional licensure is necessary for practice, including but not limited to the fields or areas of accounting, engineering, law, law enforcement, and medicine.
- (3) Full-time developmental education and adult education instructors may or may not meet minimum requirements depending on their teaching assignments and the relevancy of standards to the courses they are teaching and the transferability of such courses. If instructors are teaching credit courses reported in arts and sciences or career and technical education, it is recommended that these instructors meet minimum standards set forth in subrule 21.3(1), paragraph "a" or "b."

**281—24.6(260C) Definitions.** For purposes of interpreting rule 24.5, the following definitions shall apply: "*Field of instruction.*" The determination of what constitutes each field of instruction should be based on accepted practices of regionally accredited two- and four-year institutions of higher education.

"*Full-time instructor.*" An instructor is considered to be full-time if the community college board of directors designates the instructor as full-time. Consideration of determining full-time status shall be based on local board approved contracts.

"*Higher Learning Commission.*" The Higher Learning Commission is the accrediting authority within the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Sections 260C.47 and 260C.48 require that the state accreditation process be integrated with that of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

"*Instructors meeting minimum requirements.*" A community college instructor meeting the minimum requirements of section 260C.48, subsection 1, is a full-time instructor teaching college credit courses. Credit courses should meet requirements as specified in rule 281—21.2(260C), and meet program requirements for college parallel, career and technical education, and career-option programs as specified in rule 281—21.4(260C) and Iowa Code chapter 260C.

"*Minimum of 12 graduate hours.*" Full-time arts and sciences instructors must possess a master's degree and complete a minimum of 12 graduate hours in their field of instruction. The 12 graduate hours may be within the master's degree requirements or independent of the master's degree.

"*Relevant work experience.*" An hour of recent and relevant work experience is equal to 60 minutes. The community college will determine what constitutes recent and relevant work experience that relates to the instructor's occupational and teaching area. The college should maintain documentation of the instructor's educational and work experience.

**281—24.7(260C) Faculty load.**

- (1) *College parallel.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in college parallel programs shall not exceed a maximum of 16 credit hours per school term or the equivalent. An instructor may also have a teaching assignment outside of the normal school hours; provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment and the total workload does not exceed the equivalent of 18 credit hours within a traditional semester.
- (2) *Career and Technical education.* The full-time teaching load of an instructor in career education programs shall not exceed six hours per day, and an aggregate of 30 hours per week or the equivalent. An instructor

may also teach the equivalent of an additional three credit hours provided the instructor consents to this additional assignment. When the teaching assignment includes classroom subjects (nonlaboratory), consideration shall be given to establishing the teaching load more in conformity with that of paragraph “a” of this subrule.

**281—24.8(260C) *Special needs.*** Community colleges shall provide equal access in recruitment, enrollment, and placement activities for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities shall be given access to the full range

**281—24.9(260C) *Community College Vocational Program Review and Evaluation System*** must ensure that the programs are:

- (1) Compatible with educational reform efforts.
- (2) Capable of responding to technological change and innovation.
- (3) Meeting educational needs of the students and employment community including students with disabilities, both male and female students, from diverse racial and ethnic groups.
- (4) Enabling students enrolled to perform the minimum competencies independently.
- (5) Articulated/integrated with the total school curriculum.
- (6) Enabling students with a secondary vocational background to pursue other educational interests in a postsecondary setting, if desired.
- (7) Availing students with support services and eliminating access barriers to education and employment for both traditional and nontraditional students, men and women, persons from diverse racial and ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities.

**281—24.10(260C) *Components.*** The community college accreditation process shall include the following components:

- (1) Each community college shall submit information on an annual basis by the department of education for compliance with program evaluation requirements adopted by the state board of education.
- (2) The department of education shall conduct an on-site accreditation evaluation of each community college during the same year as the evaluation by the Higher Learning Commission.

**281—24.11(260C) *Accreditation team.*** The size and composition of the accreditation team shall be determined by the director, but the team shall include members of the department of education staff and staff members from community colleges other than the community college being evaluated for accreditation, and any other technical experts as needed.

**281—24.12(260C) *Accreditation team action.*** After a visit to a community college, the accreditation team shall evaluate whether the accreditation standards have been met and shall make a report to the director and the state board of education, together with a recommendation as to whether the community college should remain accredited. The accreditation team shall report strengths and opportunities for improvement, if any, for each standard and shall advise the community college of available resources and technical assistance to further enhance strengths and address areas for improvement. A community college may respond to the accreditation team’s report.

**281—24.13(260C) *State board of education consideration of accreditation.*** The state board of education shall determine whether a community college shall remain accredited. Approval of a community college by the state board of education shall be based on the recommendation of the director of the department of education after study of the factual and evaluative evidence on record pursuant to the standards described in this chapter, and based upon the timely submission of information required by the department of education in a format provided by the department of education. With the approval of the director of the Iowa department of education, a focus visit may be conducted if the situation at a particular college warrants such a visit.

- (1) *Accreditation granted.* Continuation of accreditation, if granted, shall be for a term consistent with the term of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission; however, approval for a lesser term may be granted by the state board of education if it determines conditions so warrant.
- (2) *Accreditation denied or conditional accreditation.* If the state board of education denies accreditation or grants conditional accreditation, the director of the department of education, in cooperation with the board of directors of the community college, shall establish a plan prescribing the procedures that must be taken to correct deficiencies in meeting the standards and shall establish a deadline for correction of the deficiencies.



The plan is subject to approval of the state board of education. Plans shall include components which address correcting deficiencies, sharing or merger options, discontinuance of specific programs or courses of study, and any other options proposed by the state board of education or the accreditation team to allow the college to meet the standards.

- (3) *Implementation of plan.* During the time specified in the plan for its implementation, the community college remains accredited. The accreditation team shall revisit the community college and shall evaluate whether the deficiencies in the standards have been corrected and shall make a report and recommendation to the director and the state board of education. The state board of education shall review the report and recommendation, may request additional information, and shall determine whether the deficiencies have been corrected.
- (4) *Removal of accreditation.* The director shall give a community college which fails to meet accreditation standards at least one year's notice prior to removal of accreditation. The notice shall be given by certified mail or restricted certified mail addressed to the chief executive officer of the community college and shall specify the reasons for removal of accreditation. The notice shall also be sent to each member of the board of directors of the community college. If, during the year, the community college remedies the reasons for removal of accreditation and satisfies the director that the community college will comply with the accreditation standards in the future, the director shall continue the accreditation and shall transmit notice of the action to the community college by certified mail or restricted certified mail.
- (5) *Failure to correct deficiencies.* If the deficiencies have not been corrected in a program of a community college, the community college board shall take one of the following actions within 60 days from removal of accreditation:
- a. Merge the deficient program or programs with a program or programs from another accredited community college.
  - b. Contract with another educational institution for purposes of program delivery at the community college.
  - c. Discontinue the program or programs which have been identified as deficient.
- (6) *Appeal process provided.* The action of the director to remove a community college's accreditation may be appealed to the state board of education as provided in section 260C.47, subsection 7.

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